POSTMODERN POACHERS:

YOUNG ADULT EXPERIENCES

OF ADVERTISING

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DECLARATION:

This thesis is my own work and has been composed entirely by me.

Stephanie O'Donohoe

To George Harte

for what it's worth

ABSTRACT

This thesis addresses young adults' everyday experiences of advertising. It aims to enhance understanding of their relationship with this pervasive and persuasive form of communication. While the findings may be of interest to advertisers, it is hoped that they will contribute to debates about the social, cultural and public policy implications of advertising.

As there is little research addressing advertising experiences directly, literature is reviewed in the areas of consumer attitudes, involvement and literacy with respect to advertising. Research in these areas suggests that consumers' relationship with advertising is rich and complex. It is argued, however, that previous research has been dominated by an American, managerial, quantitative, and positivist perspective. A lack of integration between academic and practitioner research in these areas was also observed.

Qualitative research was undertaken to explore consumers' relationship with advertising in a Scottish context. A preliminary phase consisted of interviews with ten advertising research practitioners. The main phase of the research focused on young adults aged 18-24, and compared their experiences across boundaries of age, gender and occupational status. Following a pilot study, fourteen small group discussions and fourteen individual interviews were conducted.

The young adults were found to be more active, selective and sophisticated consumers of advertising than the practitioners had suggested. They are characterised as "postmodern poachers" of advertising, reflecting their ironic and playful approach to much of it, and their often independent consumption of advertisements and brands: they appropriated advertising elements for their own purposes, many of which had little to do with marketing transactions. There appeared to be many common areas of advertising experience among the young adults, although several substantial differences emerged. The thesis concludes by considering the implications of the findings for the study, practice and regulation of advertising.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER FIVE (Cont.)

CHAPTER SEVEN (Cont.)

CHAPTER EIGHT (Cont.)

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

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PART ONE:

SETTING THE SCENE

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

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1. THE RESEARCH QUESTION AND ITS ORIGINS

This study is a qualitative exploration of young adults' everyday experiences of advertising. Its primary objective is to enhance understanding of the relationship between young adults and advertising, by offering a "thick description" (Geertz 1973) of their experiences. While this may be of interest to advertisers, the study has not adopted a managerial perspective. Tucker (1974) suggests that marketers too often study consumers as fishermen study fish. While he proposed the marine biologist's perspective as an alternative analogy, this research sought to explore the sea of advertising meanings and experiences from the fish's point of view. In adopting this perspective, the intention was to "put consumer experience back into consumer research" (Thompson et al 1989). It was hoped that a greater understanding of the ways in which people experience advertising would be particularly useful to those more concerned with advertising's social, cultural and public policy implications than its marketing effects.

Many colleagues have observed that as a PhD project progresses, it becomes an intensely personal piece of work. In this case, even the origins of the project were extremely personal, as the research question emerged from a combination of academic interests, professional experience and social interactions. The study began with a sense that consumers' response to ads was far more interesting in real life than in advertising management textbooks. Much academic research on the subject seemed to be based on simplistic models and laboratory experiments. These failed to capture the richness and complexity of consumers' reactions to advertising as suggested by my own experience.

For example, my undergraduate dissertation was based on a survey of 18-34 year-old women's response to ads for perfume and cosmetics. The questionnaire was developed from group discussions, and these began by asking respondents to look

through a range of magazine ads and talk about ones which they particularly liked or disliked. Their enthusiasm for the task was striking: they pounced on the ads, pointed out "favourites", derided others, and made comparisons with ads which were not even on the table. They speculated about the lives or personalities of the women shown in the ads, and used terms such as "surreal" or "lifestyle" to describe advertising styles. I found the casual use of such terms quite unsettling, as they were for me part of a specialist body of knowledge which had taken four years to acquire.

Subsequently, working in the alcohol industry, I sat in on and read reports from many group discussions. These also suggested that consumers' relationship with advertising was a lively and interesting one. This view was strengthened as I began reading for this study. I seemed to have a very unusual PhD topic - rather than the stereotypical conversation-stopper, it seemed to open up discussion among friends and acquaintances. They all seemed to have favourite ads, ones which puzzled or annoyed them, and pet theories about how advertising worked in general but not on them. They discussed these at length in pubs, restaurants, kitchens, and living rooms - often without any encouragement from me, as I would be trying to forget about advertising on these occasions!

Several strands of literature were consulted at the early stage of this research. Firstly, it seemed useful to examine research on attitudes to ads. Krugman's (1965) notion of advertising involvement also seemed relevant, with its emphasis on consumers making connections between the content of ads and their own lives. Social and cultural critiques of advertising offered other perspectives on the relationship between people and ads. Finally, several British advertising research practitioners had written about consumers' understanding of advertising styles, codes and conventions, and this seemed an interesting issue to pursue.

From these fragments of theory and research, the research question broadened to one concerning consumers' experience of and relationship with advertising. Holbrook and Hirschman (1982:132) have argued that consumer research focuses on information-processing and problem solving, to the neglect of experiential aspects of behaviour:

> Ignored phenomena include various playful leisure activities, sensory pleasures, daydreams, esthetic (sic) enjoyment, and emotional responses...This experiential perspective...regards consumption as a primarily subjective state of consciousness with a variety of symbolic meanings, hedonic responses, and esthetic criteria.

While they were particularly concerned with hedonic aspects of consumption (see

also Hirschman and Holbrook 1982), these authors suggested that a focus on consumer experiences may have implications for involvement, image-based and emotional responses. They also suggested that there may be a great deal of variation in experiences according to individual differences or subcultural affiliations.

Subsequent treatments of consumption experience, while emphasising emotional or hedonic issues, have much in common with the cognitive-affective-conative approach of many attitude models (Zanna 1990). For example, Hirschman and Holbrook (1986) refer to thoughts, emotions, activities and values, and they point out that thoughts include dreaming, imagining and fantasising. Similarly, Lofman (1991) discusses experience in terms of settings, sensations, thoughts, feelings, activity and evaluation. Nonetheless, Thompson et al (1989:143) argue that

> ...the term "experience" is still viewed with some of the same metaphysical suspicions behavioralists held for "mind".

Meadows (1983) has argued that people are consumers of advertising as well as of products. Thus, it was decided to address consumption experiences with respect to advertising.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND PRIMARY RESEARCH

As there was not a body of literature which directly addressed consumers' experience of advertising, areas which seemed related to this topic were examined. This led to a review of the English-language literature on consumer attitudes and involvement with respect to ads and advertising. In addition, research on "advertising literacy" was examined for another perspective on consumers' thoughts, feelings and judgments with respect to ads.

The literature review indicated that research on attitudes and involvement was predominantly American, managerial, quantitative, and positivist. There was very little empirical research on advertising literacy, but what there was had been conducted from a British and qualitative perspective. In all three areas, there was little integration of practitioner and academic perspectives. Thus, the research objectives for this study were refined, and it set out to begin redressing these imbalances.

The primary research was conducted in Edinburgh between 1989 and 1991. The

preliminary phase consisted of semi-structured interviews with ten advertising research practitioners. They were treated as key informants, whose reflections on their cumulative professional experience formed a bridge between the literature and empirical research among Scottish consumers.

Given the dangers of generalising, the main phase of the research focused on the experiences of advertising among 18-24 year-olds. Previous research suggested that the relationship between young adults and advertising would be particularly interesting for a variety of social, cultural and marketing reasons. Rather than treating young adults as a homogeneous group, the study compared their experiences across boundaries of age, gender and occupational status.

A combination of small group discussions and individual interviews was used in the main phase of the research. A pilot study at the end of 1990 consisted of four small groups and two interviews, and this was followed by fourteen groups and fourteen interviews between April and October 1991. These were intended to obtain young adults' own accounts of ads and the ways in which they experienced them. At the beginning of the groups or interviews, they were asked to describe any ads which they remembered for any reason. Discussion built upon the young adults' stories about ads, and was assisted by a sorting task. Towards the end of the sessions, they were asked to look through some magazines and talk about ads which they particularly liked or disliked.

Following Glaser and Strauss (1967), an attempt was made to develop grounded theory from the joint collection, coding and analysis of data, although the more detailed coding and analysis took place once the data had been collected. During the process of data analysis, various themes were identified which led to the examination of literature in the fields of mass communications, language, media and cultural studies.

3. THE STRUCTURE OF THIS THESIS

There are three parts to this thesis. The first of these reviews literature relating to consumers' experience of advertising. The second part explains and justifies the research approach and methods, and presents the findings from the preliminary research with advertising research practitioners. The third part analyses the data

collected from young adults, relates the findings to previous research, and considers their implications.

Thus, **Chapters Two, Three and Four** respectively address the literature on consumers' attitudes, involvement and literacy with respect to advertising. **Chapter Five** describes and assesses the empirical research programme, and **Chapter Six** presents the findings of the research among advertising research practitioners.

Chapters Seven to Twelve analyse the data from the main phase of the research programme. Young adults' advertising literacy skills are examined first, as these emerged as fundamental to an understanding of their relationship with advertising. The next two chapters address issues of attitudes and involvement. Following on from these three dimensions of their advertising experiences, the range of uses and gratifications which young adults derive from advertising is examined. The variety of positions from which they "decode" ads is then discussed. The final analysis chapter compares young adults' advertising experiences across boundaries of age, gender and occupational status. **Chapter Thirteen** draws the thesis to a close by summarising the findings and assessing their implications for the study, practice, and regulation of advertising.

As much discussion in the analysis chapters relates to particular ads, some ads have been reproduced as an aid the reader who may not be familiar with them. Print ads are presented at appropriate points in the text, and an accompanying video cassette contains television ads central to the discussion.

One final note on presentation is in order. In common with Cook (1992) and industry convention, this thesis refers to advertisements as "ads" in order to save space and time. However, as quotations from the main phase of the research will demonstrate, the young adults in this study referred to them as "adverts". This offers a literal example of a key theme in this thesis: young adults may be considered "poachers" of advertising, who appropriate its elements and use them on - and in - their own terms.

CHAPTER TWO

ATTITUDES TO ADS AND ADVERTISING

This chapter assesses the contribution of attitude research on advertising to an understanding of the ways in which consumers experience advertising. It begins with a review of literature on attitudes to advertising in general, examining their structure and substance. It then addresses research on attitudes to particular ads, as measured by practitioners' "Reaction Profiles" and academics' "attitude toward the ad" scales.

1. ATTITUDES TO ADVERTISING IN GENERAL

Public attitudes to advertising have interested researchers for several reasons. Zanot (1984) argues that the ubiquitous and pervasive presence of advertising has stimulated research by public opinion researchers as well as advertising practitioners and academics. Advertising researchers also appear to have more immediate reasons for an interest in this topic. It has been suggested, for example, that consumers' attitudes to individual ads are influenced by their attitudes to advertising in general (Bauer and Greyser 1968; Lutz 1985; Alwitt and Prabhaker 1992). Furthermore, there are concerns that consumer scepticism about advertising may undermine its effectiveness or even lead to calls for greater regulation (Calfee and Ringold 1988; Pollay and Mittal 1993).

The literature in this area addresses public approval or acceptance levels of advertising, and examines various aspects of attitudes to advertising. These issues are reviewed in turn below.

1.1. Overall acceptance of advertising

Zanot (1984) examined 38 studies of American attitudes to advertising from the 1930s to the 1970s. He found that these became increasingly negative over time, perhaps reflecting increases in the volume of advertising, the growth of consumerism, and rising concerns about the social responsibility of business. Indeed,

Alwitt and Prabhaker (1992) refer to the consensus in American research that consumers have a negative attitude to advertising.

Elsewhere, attitudes appear more positive. For example, in Canada, 60% of consumers surveyed by Crane (1991) had "mixed feelings" about advertising, with the remainder mostly approving of it. Several studies have examined European attitudes to advertising. Beatson's (1984) review of research in the early 1980s found favourable attitudes in Britain, Norway, Finland, and Germany, although opinion was somewhat more divided in France and Denmark. More recently, a Young and Rubicam survey across six European countries found that in general, over three-quarters of respondents liked advertising "a lot" or "a little" (Bonnal 1990). Similar proportions of French, German, Danish and Spanish respondents expressed positive attitudes. In Italy, however, just over half of respondents claimed to like advertising. British attitudes were the most favourable, with 84% expressing positive views. Heyder et al (1992) compared attitudes across several East and West European countries. They also found more positive attitudes in Britain than in France or West Germany, although Czechoslovakia emerged as the country best disposed to advertising. Attitudes were considerably less favourable in Poland, Hungary and East Germany.

While these studies provide some indication of British attitudes, more detailed information is provided by the Advertising Association, which has commissioned research on public attitudes to advertising over the last three decades. Approval levels between 1961 and 1992 are presented in Table 2.1. These appear quite stable: around three-quarters of respondents have tended to approve "a lot" or "a little", with the proportion dropping to approximately two-thirds during the mid 1960s and early 1970s. The first drop has been attributed to the growth of television advertising and the rise of consumer organisations, while the second may reflect consumer concerns about "misleading" ads during that period (Barnes 1982).

1.2. The structure of attitudes to advertising

Many researchers have commented on the ambivalence of consumers' attitudes to advertising. As Barnes (1982) has observed, generally favourable attitudes can co-exist quite easily with unfavourable beliefs about specific aspects. Thus, Bauer and Greyser (1968) found that American consumers respected the economic role of advertising but criticised its social effects, while Crane (1991) found contradictions

TABLE 2.1. APPROVAL LEVELS OF ADVERTISING IN BRITAIN 1961-1992

Percentage of respondents

	1961	1963	1966	1969	1972	1976	1980	1984	1988	1992
Approving a lot/little	84	74	68	79	67	73	77	77	81	76
Disapproving a lot/little	13	20	25	16	24	19	16	15	13	14
Don't know	3	6	7	4	9	8	7	8	6	10

Source: Advertising Association surveys, as reported in M. Barnes (1982), "Public Attitudes to Advertising" Journal of Advertising, 1, p 120, and Public Attitudes to Advertising 1992, London: Advertising Association, p 21.

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in Canadian consumers' attitudes to advertising's economic effects. Similarly, Tylee (1989) refers to the British public's "love-hate relationship" with advertising. He reports on a survey commissioned by Campaign, the British advertising journal, which asked respondents to describe advertising by selecting phrases and adjectives from a list. Most people chose both positive and negative items, and hardly anyone was completely against or completely in favour of advertising.

Such ambivalence suggests that attitudes to advertising have several dimensions. Indeed, that assumption is implicit in many practitioner surveys, which have sought opinions on advertising in different media and for different product categories, on those working in advertising agencies, the persuasive power of advertising, and its effect on values and lifestyles.

Within the academic literature, the dimensionality of attitudes to advertising has received more explicit attention. The work of Bauer and Greyser (1968) has been influential in this area. Their seven-item rating scale measuring the social and economic effects of advertising has been used in attitude studies among executives, Consumer Reports subscribers and school students (Pollay and Mittal 1993). While the original categorisation of the items in terms of social and economic dimensions was intuitive, subsequent factor analyses of the scale have confirmed their approach (Anderson et al 1978; Andrews 1989). Others have argued that Bauer and Greyser offer a narrow perspective on attitudes to advertising. For example, Pollay and Mittal

(1993) point to its omission of advertising's information and entertainment values. However, here Bauer and Greyser may be victims of their own reputation. While they are widely cited for their work on attitudes to advertising, they distinguished between **advertising** as an institution and **advertisements** as everyday phenomena. They researched attitudes to both, and it was in the second context that they addressed beliefs about advertising's information and entertainment value.

Perhaps in keeping with Bauer and Greyser's intentions, Sandage and Leckenby (1980) distinguished between consumer attitudes to the "institution" and the "instrument" of advertising. They used the term "institution" to refer to the purpose and effects of advertising, and "instrument" to refer to its executional attributes. A further refinement of the original framework was offered by Reid and Soley (1982), who observed that consumers may hold beliefs about advertising at both personalised and generalised levels.

Various studies have suggested other dimensions of attitudes to advertising, and these are presented in Table 2.2. below. Some offer little theoretical or methodological discussion of the items used or the dimensions identified (James and Kover 1992; Lee and Lumpkin 1992). Others, following Fishbein and Ajzen (1975), have argued that attitudes to advertising (in terms of overall evaluations) are influenced by beliefs about its attributes, and that it is these beliefs which have several dimensions.

TABLE 2.2. DIMENSIONS OF BELIEFS ABOUT ADVERTISING IN GENERAL

Study	Sample	Dimensions	Are dimensions significant predictors of attitude?
Sandage and Leckenby (1980)	US students	Institution	Not examined
		Instrument	Not examined
Reid and Soley (1982)	US adults	Personalised	Not examined
		Generalised	Not examined
Muehling (1987)	US students	Institution	Yes (direct)
		Instrument	Yes (direct)
		Functions	Yes (indirect)
		Practices	Yes (indirect)
		Industry	No
		Users	No

TABLE 2.2 ctd.

Study	Sample	Dimensions	Are dimensions significant predictors of attitude?
Andrews (1989)	US students	Social	Not examined
		Economic	Not examined
Alwitt and Prabhaker (1992)	US adults	**Beliefs:**	
		How executed	Yes
		Whether deceptive	No
		Whether informative	No
		Whether seen too much	Yes
		Whether offensive	Yes
		Personal/social benefits or costs	Yes
		Functions:	
		Hedonic	Yes
		Knowledge	Not clear
		Social contract/ learning	Not clear
		Affirmation of value	Not clear
		Attitudes to TV programming	Yes
		Demographics	Yes
James and Kover (1992)	US adults	Irritation	Not clear
		Manipulation	Not clear
Lee and Lumpkin (1992)	US adults	Informational	Not examined
		Negative social impact	Not examined
		Uselessness	Not examined
		Behavioural intention	Not examined
		Materialistic	Not examined
		Reliability	Not examined
		Attractive	Not examined
Durvasula et al (1993)	Students in 5 countries	Institution	Yes(direct)
		Instrument	Yes (direct)
		Functions	Yes (indirect)
		Practices	Yes (indirect)
Pollay and Mittal (1993)	US students US adults	**Personal uses:**	
		Product information	Yes
		Social role and image	Varied
		Hedonic/pleasure	Yes
		Societal effects:	
		Good for the economy	Yes
		Materialism	Yes
		Corrupts values	Varied
		Falsity/no sense	Yes

Using thought-listing procedures, Muehling (1987) found that students' perceptions of advertising could be categorised in terms of advertising functions, practice, industry workers, and clients. Following Sandage and Leckenby (1980), he also used measures of attitude-institution, attitude-instrument, and attitude to advertising in general. He suggested that perceptions would influence attitudes to advertising indirectly, via institution and instrument attitudes. Only function and practice perceptions were found to do so, however. Durvasula et al (1993) used Muehling's revised model in their cross-cultural study of attitudes to advertising.

Alwitt and Prabhaker (1992) propose four types of dimension influencing attitudes to television advertising. **Belief** dimensions include its informational qualities, execution, deceptiveness and offensiveness. Incorporating a media uses and gratifications perspective, they add four **function** or benefit dimensions to their model, relating to hedonism, knowledge, social learning or contact, and affirmation of values. The third dimension concerns **attitudes to TV programming**. Finally, **demographic characteristics** are presented as another "dimension" of attitudes to advertising. These may well influence attitudes, but can hardly be considered a dimension in the same way as the others. Conceptual clarity is lost elsewhere in the model. For example, a "belief" about the informative nature of advertising may also be considered in terms of the knowledge "function".

Pollay and Mittal (1993) offer a parsimonious model, based on an extensive literature review of attitudes to and criticisms of advertising. They distinguish between advertising as an instrument and an institution, and between personalised and generalised attitudes. Their model implicitly incorporates a uses and gratifications perspective, as belief dimensions are categorised into "personal uses" and "societal effects".

The Pollay and Mittal model proposes seven primary determinants of attitudes to advertising, which may be described in terms of two general categories. At the **micro** level, they suggest three groups of personal uses: product information, social role and image, and hedonism or pleasure. At the **macro** level, they propose four groups of beliefs about the societal effects of advertising: its effect on the economy and materialism, value corruption, and the extent to which it seems false or lacking sense.

Several issues arise from an examination of these studies. Firstly, many of the dimensions and items appear to be derived from reviews of previous research or the

critical literature on advertising, rather than on consumer-based exploratory research. The Muehling (1987) and Pollay and Mittal (1993) models were based in part on thought-listing or open-ended questions. However, there still seems to be scope for improving the construct validity of such research by using exploratory methods such as focus groups to generate items relevant to the domain of interest (Churchill 1979).

Secondly, given differences in British and American levels of approval with respect to advertising, it is disappointing that research addressing the structure of advertising beliefs is almost entirely American. As Durvasula et al (1993) point out, it is important not to assume the cross-cultural applicability of American models and constructs. This seems particularly relevant here. As we have seen, approval of advertising appears to differ between America and Britain. Furthermore, substantial differences have also been identified in terms of advertising styles and content (Lannon 1985, Weinberger and Spotts 1989; Katz and Lee 1992), and even implicit models of communication (Carey 1992).

Thirdly, a great deal of the research on the structure of attitudes to advertising is based on student samples. Holbrook (1978) has argued that students' psychological processes and attitude structures should not differ dramatically from those of the broader consumer population. However, others have challenged the validity of research based on student samples (Soley and Reid 1983a; Sears 1986; Wells 1993). In this context, Pollay and Mittal (1993) found that the factor structure of beliefs among student and consumer panel samples were different.

Nonetheless, these studies indicate that attitudes to advertising are based, at least in part, on complex and multidimensional beliefs. While different studies have identified different dimensions or used different terms to describe them, there appears to be some consensus that beliefs about advertising exist at two levels. Some beliefs, such as those concerning informational or entertainment value of advertising, may be described in terms of consumers' cumulative personal experience. These correspond to the "instrument", "personalised", or "micro-level personal uses" categories discussed above. Other beliefs, such as those about the effect of advertising on the economy, move beyond consumers' individual experience to consider advertising at a "generalised", "institutional" or "macro" level.

This chapter has so far considered consumers' overall acceptance of advertising and the underlying structure of their attitudes to it. It now reviews research on the

substance of those attitudes, building on the framework outlined above. Research at the level of personal experience is examined first, followed by an examination of beliefs about the institution of advertising. Although some studies refer to attitudes in other countries (Beatson 1984; Bonnal 1990; Crane 1991; Heyder et al 1992), the following sections focus on American and British research.

1.3. Personal experience of advertising

Various dimensions of consumers' personal experience with respect to advertising are discussed in the practitioner and academic literature. These refer to perceptions of advertising's entertainment and information value, attitudes to advertising in different media and for different products, wariness of advertising's persuasive or manipulative qualities, and perceptions of its repetitive nature.

1.3.1. Entertainment, information and repetition

Several studies have addressed consumers' requirements and perceptions regarding the information and entertainment qualities of advertising. Bauer and Greyser (1968) requested respondents to count the number of ads which they noticed during a particular period, and to categorise those which struck them in particular ways. Of the categorised ads, 36% were considered enjoyable, and a further 36% were considered informative: only 23% were considered annoying, and 5% offensive.

American opinion polls between 1974 and 1984 found approximately three-quarters of respondents agreeing that advertising provides useful information about products and services (Calfee and Ringold 1988). However, just over half of the consumers surveyed by Alwitt and Prabhaker (1992) agreed that television advertising was a good way of learning about the availability of goods and services. A similar proportion of Haller's (1974) student sample agreed that advertising was a good information source, and almost three-quarters thought that most advertising contained too little information. An indicator of the importance of such issues is provided by Lee and Lumpkin (1992), who found that those using video cassette recorder (VCR) technology to avoid commercials tended to be less convinced of the informational value of advertising.

In Britain, consumers appear to consider advertising creative, witty, entertaining and informative (Hall 1989; Bonnal 1990; Heyder et al 1992). Other studies have

confirmed the British public's enjoyment of advertising. Thus, Gordon (1984), in a paper entitled "The ads are better than the programmes", argues that British consumers tend to appreciate executional elements of advertising, both visual and verbal. However, underlining the ambivalence of attitudes to advertising, several researchers have pointed out that many who find advertising entertaining also refer to it as "stupid" or "annoying" (Barnes 1982; Beatson 1984; Tylee 1989).

Some studies challenge the view that British consumers perceive advertising as informative. Just over half of the respondents to an Advertising Standards Authority (1990) survey agreed that "advertising in newspapers, posters and magazines helps you decide what to buy". Similarly, only 51% of Scottish consumers acknowledged that advertising on television had told them something they did not know about a particular product or company (System Three 1989). This may not be too significant, however: Treasure and Joyce (1967, in Barnes 1982:124) found that although British consumers claimed to like informative advertising, they tended to judge television ads by the entertainment standards applied to television programmes.

While consumers appreciate entertainment and information they do not appear so well-disposed toward advertising's repetitive qualities. Bauer and Greyser (1968) found that the most common reason given for an ad being categorised as "annoying" was that they had heard or seen it too often. More recently, nine out of ten American consumers agreed that the same television commercials were shown again and again, and that there are too many commercials in a row (Alwitt and Prabhaker 1992). In Britain, Vale (1989) reports that around 40% of respondents to the IBA's television attitudes survey believed that there are too many ads on television. Krugman (1975) has suggested that three exposures may be optimal, as consumers would be sufficiently familiar with an ad at that level, without becoming bored. Rossiter & Percy (1987) relate repetition to advertising wearout, which occurs when ads cease to meet their objectives. They suggest that consumers may pay less attention to an ad once they have processed it several times.

1.3.2. The influence of media and product type on attitudes to advertising

Several American studies have addressed perceptions about advertising in different media. Press ads consistently emerged as the most informative, with magazine ads also considered relatively enjoyable (Haller 1974; Soley and Reid 1983b). Bauer and Greyser (1968) offer some qualifications regarding press advertising. They found

that while magazine and television ads were considered particularly "enjoyable", they were also more likely to be categorised as "annoying" than those in other media. The few ads considered "offensive" tended to be in the press rather than on radio or television. Among Haller's (1974) student sample, however, ads on television, radio and outdoor media were considered to be more annoying or offensive than those in newspapers or magazines. Schutz and Casey (1981) found that all or most television advertising was considered "seriously misleading" by four out of ten respondents in their survey. A quarter of their respondents thought that of magazine ads, while only a fifth were as critical of radio or newspaper ads.

The Advertising Association surveys have sought British consumers' opinion on advertising in different media. The 1966 and 1972 surveys found advertising to be more popular in the press than on television, but since then television advertising has been the more favoured. According to the latest survey (Advertising Association 1992), television advertising is "liked" or "quite liked" by just over half of respondents, and press and poster advertising by around a third. Attitudes to television advertising appear to be more sharply focused, with 18% expressing a negative attitude, and less than a third maintaining a neutral position. In contrast, more than half of the sample expressed no opinion on press or poster advertising.

Tylee (1989) reports that television was cited by three-quarters of Campaign's respondents as a source of particularly useful and informative advertising. Newspapers were mentioned by just over a quarter, and magazines by less than a fifth. Ads on radio, posters and in the cinema were mentioned by very few respondents as good information sources.

The entertainment value of television advertising in particular is reinforced in other studies. Heyder et al (1992) found that 73% of their British sample most enjoyed advertising on television. Indeed, 73% of respondents to the Campaign survey agreed that "TV advertising is sometimes more entertaining than the TV programmes" (Tylee 1989). Advertising material was enjoyed more than editorial material in the press by only a third of respondents in the Advertising Standards Authority (1990) survey. These proportions are not directly comparable, however, as the latter referred to "often" preferring ads rather than just "sometimes".

As Bauer and Greyser (1968) point out, it is difficult to specify cause and effect when considering relationships between ad attitudes and use of brands or product categories. Varying attitudes to ads for different products may reflect different

interest levels in the products themselves. They may also be due to preferences for particular ad executions associated with certain product categories. Nonetheless, Bauer and Greyser found some interesting patterns of attitudes to ads and product or brand usage. For example, people who used a product or preferred a brand were more likely to consider an ad for it "enjoyable" than those who did not. Conversely, those who did not use a product or would not buy a brand were more likely to consider an ad for it "annoying". In general, however, ads for soft drinks, cameras, toilet soap and confectionery were considered the most enjoyable, while those for detergents, dental products, depilatories, deodorants, and underwear were thought the most annoying. Ads for spirits, films and underwear were the most likely to be considered offensive.

More recently, studying American consumers' liking of 80 television commercials, Biel and Bridgewater (1990) found that ads for food and beverage products were liked more than those for medicine, personal care and household products: 80% of the best-liked commercials were for food or beverages. They point out that ads for other product categories tended to be liked less, rather than disliked.

Reporting on qualitative research among British adults, Hall (1989) mentions that they enjoyed the cleverness of cigarette ads and the humour of ads for products such as beer or British Telecom. They disliked "formula-style" ads such as those for washing powder, and opinion was divided on ads for sanitary protection. They were impressed by the grand scale of corporate ads, but expressed reservations about privitisation campaigns. While they claimed to seek factual and straightforward advertising of financial services, the ads which they remembered and liked in that sector (and for cars) were those with entertaining executions and good soundtracks. The recession seemed to influence attitudes to ads for some products. Thus, ads for holidays and durables were occasionally resented for "taunting" people, and toy advertising was criticised for appealing directly to children, thereby making things more difficult for parents.

Tylee (1989) reports somewhat similar findings from the Campaign survey, in that ads for beer, lager, tea, coffee, and cars emerged as the most popular. The most disliked ads, on the other hand, were typically for washing powder, banks, building societies, and insurance products.

1.3.3. Wariness of advertising

Consumers' wariness about advertising may be attributed to its perceived persuasive intent, and concerns that it might therefore seek to deceive or manipulate them. Reviewing American opinion polls, Calfee and Ringold (1988) note that between 1964 and 1978, agreement with the statement that it "frequently seeks to persuade people to buy things they don't need or can't afford" rose from 54% to 71%. Furthermore, between 1975 and 1984, approximately seven out of every ten respondents felt it was "largely true" that "American business and industry hoodwinks the public through advertising". While 41% of Bauer and Greyser's (1968) respondents agreed that advertising generally presents a "true picture" of products, Alwitt and Prabhaker (1992) found only 16% agreed that was the case with television advertising. Some of the difference may reflect changes over time, but it may also be attributed to perceptions about advertising in different media.

Bonnal (1990) reports that European consumers' primary requirement of advertising was that it should be honest, and that it was generally perceived to fall short of that requirement. Indeed, the Campaign survey found that only one in twenty respondents considered advertising to be truthful or honest, while 15% considered it dishonest (Tylee 1989).

In addition to believing that advertising may be deceptive, it appears that consumers suspect that they are being manipulated in other ways. Rogers and Smith (1993) examined public perceptions of subliminal advertising in America. Their telephone survey found spontaneous awareness of the concept to be 53%, with a further 21% claiming awareness once it was explained. More than half of those aware of subliminal advertising believed it to be actually used, and almost three quarters of those thought it was successful.

Thus, it appears that consumers are deeply suspicious of advertising. However, Reid and Soley (1982) have argued that consumers have both personalised and generalised attitudes to advertising, and believe themselves to be less gullible than others. In this context, Barnes (1982) discusses two British surveys which addressed the issue of misleading ads in different terms. Thus, 78% of consumers agreed that "advertising often misleads consumers", while only 28% agreed that they were frequently misled themselves. A similar pattern was observed with respect to the manipulative nature of advertising: 78% believed that it "often makes consumers buy goods which they do not really need", but only 15% agreed that it had that effect on

them personally. Hall (1989:23) also notes that few consumers considered themselves to be "taken in" or "fooled" by advertising:

> "I take it with a pinch of salt", they say. "It may be a con, but it doesn't con me".

Indeed, this phenomenon appears so widespread that Pollay (1986:23) refers to the "myth of personal immunity" to advertising, and he suggests that it is "a delusion for some or perhaps many or even most of the public". This is not to say that consumers deny the influence of advertising altogether. Tylee (1989) reports that over a fifth of Campaign's respondents admitted buying a product after seeing it advertised. Just over half of the Scottish consumers surveyed by System Three (1989) said that they had been encouraged to buy a product or use a company after seeing a television ad.

1.4. Beliefs about the institution of advertising

In addition to beliefs about advertising drawn from consumers' personal and immediate experience of ads, the literature addresses perceptions of advertising as an institution. Beliefs about its economic and social effects are discussed below, together with perceptions of advertising industry workers.

1.4.1. Concerns about advertising's economic and social effects

According to Leiss et al (1990) advertising stands at the intersection of industry, communication and group interaction, and may therefore be criticised by anyone concerned about any of these domains. Perhaps the best-known work in this area is the review by Pollay (1986) of advertising's "unintended consequences". Drawing on a wide range of critiques, he argues that advertising is pervasive, repetitive, professionally developed, and consumed by people who are increasingly detached from the institutions of church, family and school. Therefore, it is influential in encouraging greater commercialism and materialism in Western culture. Pollay also sees advertising as intrusive, encouraging passivity, irrationality, self-doubt, and alienation from a sense of community. Finally, he argues that it subverts traditional religious morality, endorsing the "deadly sins" of lust, sloth, greed and pride.

The literature indicates that some of these concerns are shared by consumers. Various studies of public attitudes to advertising have explained some of their ambivalence in terms of unease about its economic and social effects. Turning first to economic effects, Bauer and Greyser (1968) found that over 70% of their sample

felt that advertising raised the standard of living and led to better products. However, opinion was divided concerning its impact on prices. Zanot (1984) refers to subsequent American studies indicating consumer distrust of its effect on the economy. Other American and British studies have found particular suspicion about its effect on prices (Haller 1974; Barnes 1982; Reid and Soley 1982; Andrews 1989).

In terms of advertising's social effects, consumers have expressed concern about issues such as stereotyped portrayals, the fostering of materialism and advertising to children. For example, Haller (1974) found that more than half of his student sample agreed that realistic portrayals in advertising were important, but only 2% thought that portrayals were realistic. Pollay and Mittal (1993) found beliefs about advertising's role in fostering materialism directly influenced consumers' attitudes to advertising and Crane (1991) found considerable concern about the influence of advertising on children.

In Britain, the Advertising Association recontacted respondents to the 1980 survey who had disapproved of advertising. They found that the main criticisms related to its stereotyped portrayals of women, sex, and family relationships, and its emphasis on the ease and desirability of obtaining products (Barnes 1982). More recently, the Advertising Standards Authority (1990) found that such concerns were not restricted to a small minority. In its survey of public attitudes, a fifth of men and a third of women claimed to be "deeply concerned" about the portrayal of women in advertising. Furthermore, over half of all respondents agreed that "a lot of press and poster ads give people a false view of the world which is harmful". The study compared the views of the general public with those of people who had actually complained about advertising portrayals of women to the Advertising Standards Authority. Complainants seemed to attribute a more generalised effect on social attitudes and beliefs to advertising than others. However, differences in concern seemed to be more a matter of degree than direction, as all respondents seemed most concerned about the gratuitous use of nudity, semi-nudity, or sex in advertising.

1.4.2. Attitudes to those working in advertising agencies

Zanot (1984) reports on a 1961 study which may have disturbed the sense of community in several American suburbs at the time. It examined the qualities which advertising employees and their neighbours attributed to "admen". Predictably, those in the industry painted a very positive picture. Their neighbours, however, were

more stinting in their praise: while more than half considered admen to be "original and creative", "extrovert", and "interested in ideas", they also described them as "glib and superficial", "neurotic", and "heavy drinkers". No neighbours considered admen "honest" or "straightforward", and only 2% considered their work useful to society.

Some of these images are reflected in a later qualitative British study. Hall (1989) describes impressions of those working in advertising held by men and women aged 30-45. They thought advertising people were "brilliant" and earned "silly money", but worked long hours in a risky business, and to tight deadlines. They were considered to be rather sophisticated, with a taste for gin and tonic, expensive wine (and black coffee, as they were always "on the go"). Indeed,

> They are perceived as being similar to some of the characters in the ads themselves, living in warehouse apartments, surrounded by copies of The Guardian, The Independent - and more black coffee...possibly sporting snazzy bow ties...(p 24).

1.5. The salience of advertising

Bauer and Greyser (1968) measured the relative salience of advertising by presenting respondents with ten topics (including religion, advertising, big business, and bringing up children) and asking which three or four they talked about most and least. Advertising was last in the list of issues most talked about, and third in the list of those least talked about. One in five respondents mentioned it as something they half-heartedly complained about, and 15% considered it to be one of the issues most in need of immediate attention and change. The authors concluded that advertising did not have a central position in people's consciousness.

Once again, Bauer and Greyser provided a model for subsequent research. Using a similar approach, Alwitt and Prabhaker (1992) found television advertising was the topic most talked about by 10% of their sample, and "rarely" talked about by 24%. Similarly, the most recent Advertising Association survey found that advertising was the topic most talked about by 10% when a "standard" list was used, and by 7% when a new list, including Aids, drug use, and violent crime, was used. The report (Advertising Association 1992:1), concludes that

> Advertising remains extremely low on people's list of concerns. Few people talk about it, fewer still hold strong opinions on the subject, and only a small minority feel that any major change is needed in this area.

However, the case for the low salience of advertising appears overstated in these reports. Firstly, assertions that people "rarely" or simply "do not talk about it much" are not substantiated. Respondents were not asked whether they talked about each topic on the list, but to nominate the most and least discussed issues. Secondly, as the competing issues included religion, violent crime, and the bringing up of children, it is hardly surprising that advertising is a relatively uncommon topic of conversation. As Barnes (1982) points out, we would expect these issues to be of fundamentally greater importance to most people than advertising. Indeed, given the highly charged nature of the competing topics, it seems quite extraordinary (if not actually disturbing) that as many as a tenth of respondents chose advertising as a relatively common topic of conversation. This does not seem to indicate a lack of salience, but quite the reverse.

It may be in the advertising industry's interests to play down the importance of advertising, as it is useful way of deflecting criticism or calls for greater regulation. Thus, referring to the apparently low levels of salience, the Advertising Association (1992:2) advises that

> This fact should be fully understood by policy makers so that they are not misled by the clamour of tiny and totally unrepresentative anti-advertising lobbies.

However, 55% of Campaign's respondents agreed that there should be more regulation of advertising (Tylee 1989). Similarly, more than half of Americans polled by The Roper Organization between 1974 and 1984 thought ad claims were not sufficiently regulated (Calfee and Ringold 1988).

Given such concerns, the survey conducted by the Advertising Standards Authority (1990) is interesting. It examined perceptions of people who complain about ads among the British public. Eight out of ten respondents agreed that complainants did something that many others would like to do if they were not "too lazy". Three-quarters agreed that they were "perfectly normal people", and only a quarter thought that they "want to be offended". However, four out of ten respondents agreed that complainants "get things out of proportion", and half thought that they "take it all too seriously". This again indicates an ambivalent stance on advertising: it is worth complaining about, although those who do so are somehow misguided.

1.6. Advertising avoidance

Deliberate avoidance of ads may be considered another indicator of the salience of negative attitudes to advertising. This has most commonly been investigated in the context of television ads. Kitchen (1986) is one of many who have argued that the diffusion of VCRs and remote control television makes it increasingly easy for consumers to avoid commercials. Lee and Lumpkin (1992) researched American VCR user behaviour, finding that 39% of respondents claimed to "almost always" avoid ads when recording or replaying programmes. A further 44% "sometimes" did so, while 17% "rarely" avoided ads. Not surprisingly, the authors concluded that VCR users who "zipped" or "zapped" commercials had more negative attitudes towards television advertising than others. It is however interesting that "avoiders" tended to be more critical of advertising's effects in fostering materialism.

Of course, access to video or remote control technology is not necessary to avoid television ads. A survey of Scottish consumers' attitudes to advertising (System Three 1989) found that 23% of consumers "hardly ever" or "never" watched television ads, while 35% "sometimes" watched them and a further 42% "always" or "mostly" did so. Thus, it seems that many consumers allow themselves to be exposed to television advertising, at least selectively. This suggests that consumers discriminate between ads, liking some and disliking others. Once again, this is consistent with the view that attitudes to advertising are complex, multidimensional and ambivalent.

1.7. Differences in attitude to advertising between social groups.

Bauer and Greyser (1968) were surprised to find that attitudes to advertising were only mildly related to respondents' age, sex, income and education. College graduates tended to look on it less favourably, but expressed mixed rather than negative feelings. The failure of demographics to account for much variance in attitudes is consistent with the findings of Durand and Lambert (1985). They surveyed customers of an American utility, and found that criticisms of advertising were better explained by a sense of consumer and political alienation than by demographic characteristics. Furthermore, demographics did not mediate the effect of alienation on attitudes to advertising.

Other studies have found some links between attitudes and demographic characteristics. Alwitt and Prabhaker (1992) report that older, wealthier respondents,

and those with fewer television sets, liked television advertising less. In Britain, the Advertising Standards Authority (1990) reports that its complainants tended to be upper- or middle-class women with higher education. They tended to watch less commercial television, but were more likely than others to be vegetarian, members of voluntary organisations or pressure groups, and to read a "quality" newspaper.

Zanot (1984) observes that the young people in the studies which he examined tended to have the most negative attitudes towards advertising. Consistent with this, but hardly surprising, is Haller's (1974) finding that students tended to be more critical of advertising than businessmen. However, in Britain, those aged 15-24 have been found to be more positively disposed to advertising than older consumers (Barnes 1982; Beatson 1984; System Three 1989; Tylee 1989; Advertising Association 1992).

Differences in beliefs as well as overall approval have been observed between various social groups. Thus, as we have seen, Pollay and Mittal (1993) found differences in the factor structure of beliefs between student and consumer panel samples. Rogers and Smith (1993) found that younger and better educated respondents tended to believe more than others in the existence and effectiveness of subliminal advertising.

Finally, two American studies indicate that beliefs differ significantly even within particular social groups. Larkin (1977) examined students' attitudes to advertising. He found that more than half were strongly "anti-advertising", believing it to have little economic or social value. Other clusters of students were less critical of either its economic or social role, and there were also differences in attitudes towards increased government regulation of advertising.

Pollay and Mittal (1993) conducted a cluster analysis on student and consumer panel attitudes and beliefs with respect to advertising. They identified four segments within each group, presented in Table 2.3. below. Two segments were common, although their size differed considerably between the groups. Attitudes among the consumer panel appear polarised, with the majority of respondents either approving or disapproving of advertising. Among the students, however, attitudes seem more ambivalent, as over half express both favourable and unfavourable beliefs. This is similar to the earlier findings of Bauer and Greyser with respect to graduates.

TABLE 2.3. ATTITUDINAL SEGMENTS IDENTIFIED BY POLLAY AND MITTAL (1993)

STUDENT SAMPLE:	CONSUMER PANEL SAMPLE:
Contented consumers (28%)	**Contented consumers (38%)**
Most favourable global attitudes. Supportive of advertising with few reservations.	
Critical cynics (20%)	**Critical cynics (39%)**
Most negative and consistently critical, in terms of personal uses and societal effects.	
Compromised concerned (45%)	**Deceptiveness wary (7%)**
Similar to contented consumers in global attitude and perceptions of personal uses and economic benefits, but see negative societal effect in terms of materialism, falsity, and value corruption.	Slightly critical global attitude. Value information and entertainment qualities, but perceive little economic benefit. Most critical of falsity/no sense. Least critical of materialism and value corruption.
Conflicted Calvinists (8%)	**Degeneracy wary (16%)**
Unfavourable overall attitude. Value information and entertainment, but most critical of materialism, value corruption and falsity/no sense.	Slightly critical global attitude. Appreciate personal uses but deny economic benefits and see it as socially/culturally detrimental.

Source: Pollay, R.W. and Mittal, B. (1993), "Here's the beef: factors, determinants, and segments in consumer criticism of advertising", Journal of Marketing, vol 57, July, p 109.

Taken together, these studies indicate that in the Western world at least, attitudes to advertising are complex, multidimensional, and ambivalent. Given the manifest richness of this territory, it is surprising that there has been little research designed to explore and understand such attitudes rather than to measure them. Furthermore, given differences between British and American attitudes and advertising styles, and between student and general adult samples, it is disappointing that research examining the structure of advertising beliefs relies so heavily on surveys of American students.

2. ATTITUDES TO PARTICULAR ADS

Public attitudes to advertising have been researched by those interested in its societal effects as well as its marketing implications. In contrast, researchers examining attitudes to particular ads generally adopt a managerial perspective, addressing issues of marketing effectiveness. Within this framework, however, there are several research streams. Research on "Reaction Profiles", incorporating issues of "ad likability" has largely been the preserve of practitioners. Studies of "attitude to the

ad", and related research on "affective" and "cognitive" response, have been conducted almost exclusively by academics. This chapter next considers the practitioner-driven approach, and then turns to academic research.

2.1. Practitioner perspectives

Aaker and Stayman (1990) observe that most advertising agencies and research companies use some set of adjectives or phrases to measure consumers' reactions to ads. Lutz (1985) describes the typical Reaction Profile as a 20 to 30 item checklist designed to tap a variety of perceptual dimensions of ad response: consumers may be asked to rate an ad on criteria such as humour, warmth, or attractiveness, for example. Some scales have used phrases or whole sentences (Schlinger 1979 a,b; Wells 1964a), some have only addressed print ads (Wells 1964a), and some have focused on the "objective features" of commercials (McEwan and Leavitt 1976; Mehotra et al 1981). In general, however, Reaction Profiles use adjectives rather than sentences, relate to ads on television or in various media, and address target consumers' "subjective" responses to ads. Most instruments are the product of a lengthy and iterative development process, such as those described by Wells (1964a), Schlinger (1979 a,b) and Moldovan (1985).

Reaction Profiles appear to be valued mainly for diagnostic reasons. Thus, Schlinger finds them particularly helpful in identifying strengths and weaknesses in rough or finished ads. Similarly, Wells et al (1971) observe that they are a useful way of determining whether an ad produces the intended reaction: if an ad is supposed to be funny, for example, it is important to find out whether consumers think it is.

2.1.1. Reaction Profiles and underlying dimensions of ad response

In addition to providing useful diagnostic information on individual ads, the standardised format of Reaction Profile scales makes them amenable to routine, repeated use, yielding easily quantified data and facilitating comparisons between ads. Several agencies have reported their findings in aggregate form, based on factor analyses of the scales to identify the underlying dimensions of response to ads. However, as Lutz (1985) has pointed out, published studies do not lend themselves easily to comparison: virtually every study has used some unique adjectives or items, and there is no consensus about the underlying dimensionality of Reaction Profiles.

This lack of consensus is evident even in reports of what they are intended to measure. Thus, Wells (1964a) explains that his scales tapped into responses which were not simply emotional. Similarly, Aaker and Bruzzone (1981) refer to both thinking and liking, while Moldovan (1985) claims that his scales address comprehension, feeling, involvement and persuasion. In contrast, Schlinger (1979b:37) argues that her Viewer Response Profile (VRP) describes "the viewer's experience of a commercial", focusing on

> ...the emotional component of communication effects. The VRP indicates how people feel after seeing a commercial rather than what they know.

However, some VRP items do appear to address cognitive responses. For example, one item states "I learned something from the commercial that I didn't know before". Indeed, Plummer (1971), who worked with Schlinger at Leo Burnett, described the scales as capturing consumers' "immediate cognitive response to commercials". Similarly, Lutz (1985) treats Reaction Profile responses as cognitive rather than affective.

Disagreement about the dimensionality of consumers' response to ads is also reflected in reports of factor analyses conducted by various agencies on their accumulated data. Table 2.4. summarises the major published studies and the various dimensions which they identified. The variation across studies is interesting, as many of the items used in later studies were derived from earlier ones.

There are also some interesting similarities between the studies. They all appear to have identified cognitive and affective dimensions. Furthermore, Wells (1964a) and Zinkhan and Fornell (1985) found similarities between their factor solutions and the "attractiveness", "potency", and "vitality" dimensions of meaning identified by Osgood et al (1957). Indeed, other studies could also be interpreted within that framework. Thus, the "lively" and "stimulating" factors are consistent with the "vitality" dimension. "Liking", "entertaining", and "warm" seem similar to the "attractiveness" dimension, and "meaningful", "credible", or "authoritative" factors correspond to the "potency" dimension.

Finally, Aaker and Stayman (1990) argue that four factors - "informative", "dislikeable", "warm" and "entertaining" - tend to emerge consistently. The warmth factor does not emerge as frequently from the studies summarised here, but the other three factors reflect the "enjoyable", "informative" and "annoying" categories used by Bauer and Greyser (1968).

TABLE 2.4. DIMENSIONS IDENTIFIED IN REACTION PROFILE RESEARCH

Study	Source of items	Sample	Exposure	Dimensions
Wells (1964a)	Consumer comments, Thesaurus	48 print ads 600 resps	Forced	Attractiveness Meaningfulness Vitality
Leavitt (1970)	Other studies	76 TV ads 2,280 resps	Forced	Energetic/ amusing Personal relevance Sensual Familiar Novel Authoritative Disliked
Wells, Leavitt & McConville (1971)	Other studies Thesaurus, Colleagues	Not reported	Forced	Relevant news Brand reinforcement Stimulating Empathy Familiarity Confusion
Plummer (1971)	Leo Burnett ad agency/ Leavitt 1970	100+ TV ads 4,000+ resps	Forced	Entertainment/ stimulation Irritation Familiarity Empathy/ gratifying involvement Confusion Information/ personal relevance Brand reinforcement
Leavitt (1975)	Wells et al (1971)			Stimulating Relevant Gratifying Familiar
Schlinger (1979a)	Consumer verbatims, Ad theory	500+ ads 4,000+ resps	Forced	Entertainment Confusion Relevant news Brand reinforcement Empathy Familiarity Alienation
Aaker and Bruzzone (1981)	Wells et al Leavitt Other	524 TV ads 260,000 resps	Retrospective reminder	Entertaining Personal relevance Dislike Warm
Sullivan and O'Connor (1982)	Leavitt (1975), shortened	4 TV ads 155 resps	Forced	Stimulating Monotonous Relevance Irritating Likable

Key: (?): questions raised concerning factor validity; resps: respondents

TABLE 2.4 CTD.

Study	Source of items	Sample	Exposure	Dimensions
Lastovicka (1983)	Leo Burnett ad agency	6 TV ads 634 resps	Forced	Relevance Entertainment Confusion (?)
Zinkhan and Burton (1985)	Wells (1964a)	20 print ads 400 resps	Forced	Attractive Meaningful Vitality
	Leavitt (1970)	20 TV ads 400 resps	Forced	Energetic(?) Relevance(?) Familiar Sensual(?)
Moldovan (1985)	SSC & B Lintas ad agency	"hundreds of commercial, thousands of respondents"	Forced	Clarity Tastefulness Stimulation Credibility Empathy/self involvement
Zinkhan and Burton (1989)	Leavitt (1975)	15 TV ads 300 resps	Forced	Stimulating Relevant Gratifying
	Schlinger (1979a)	15 TV ads 390 resps	Forced	Confusion Entertaining Relevant News
Biel and Bridgewater (1990)	Modified Aaker & Bruzzone	80 ads 1,277 resps	Retrospective reminder	Meaningful Energy Rubs wrong way Ingenuity Warmth
Aaker and Stayman (1990)	As Biel and Bridgewater (1990)			**Across ads:** Entertaining Stimulating Informative Warm Dislikeable **Across respondents:** Entertaining/humour Informative/effective Irritating/silly Warm Familiar Believable Confusing Dull Lively
Greene (1992)	Not disclosed	8 ads Resp no. not disclosed	Forced	Communication/ persuasiveness Entertainment

Key: (?): questions raised concerning factor validity

Of the remaining factors, the themes of involvement and familiarity appear consistently. The issue of involvement will be examined in the next chapter. A familiarity dimension should not be surprising, as many ads are for well-established brands, and use common styles or formats (Aaker et al 1992).

In general, Reaction Profile studies suggest that across a wide range of ads and consumers, ad reactions can be described in terms of an underlying set of dimensions. While this may help to crystalise agency thinking, it may also lead to reductive, formulaic thinking. Thus, Schlinger emphasises that particular scores or configurations are not inherently desirable, as different ads are designed to achieve different objectives. Aaker and Stayman (1990) underline the complexity and richness of consumers' response to ads. Their individual level factor analysis identified nine dimensions. However, when they followed the common practice of aggregating the data across individuals, the number of factors was reduced to five. Thus, they argue that this practice may sacrifice richness and obscure the great subtlety and complexity of advertising response at an individual level.

Many studies have limited themselves to identifying underlying dimensions of consumers' reactions to ads. However, the Reaction Profile literature has also addressed to some extent the general favourability of responses and the validity of various scales. Finally, the mechanisms by which consumers' perceptions of ads may influence effectiveness have received some attention, as has the predictive value of some scales.

Sandage and Leckenby (1980) suggest that consumers are more critical of the "instrument" than the "institution" of advertising. However, Schlinger (1979a) notes that ads tend to be rated positively on the VRP, and argues that "consumers seem to like commercials but dislike advertising". Similarly, Biel and Bridgewater (1990) found that the average commercial in their study was liked by six out of every ten respondents, and disliked by only one in ten. Thus, they suggest that "people like commercials far more than industry folklore would predict". Such generalisations on the basis of respondents' reactions to one ad in isolation appear dubious. However, Bauer and Greyser (1968) also found more favourable attitudes to individual ads than to advertising in general.

Lastovicka (1983) tested the convergent and divergent validity of scales relating to relevance, confusion and entertainment rather than a particular reaction profile instrument. He was satisfied with the performance of relevance and entertainment

scales, but not with that of the confusion scales. Zinkhan and Fornell (1985) confirmed the factor structure of the Wells (1964a) scales, but were less satisfied with Leavitt's (1970) Reaction Profile, particularly with respect to the "sensual" dimension. A similar exercise was conducted by Zinkhan and Burton (1989) on Leavitt's (1975) scale, and on Schlinger's (1979a) VRP. Their analysis confirmed all but the "warmth" factor from the Leavitt scale, while challenging all Schlinger's factors apart from "confusion".

Aaker and Bruzzone (1981) consider the mechanisms by which ad perceptions may influence effectiveness, referring to the Silk and Vavra (1974) review of research on affective response to advertising. This found limited support for the "superiority of the pleasant" hypothesis, as well-liked ads tended to be more effective than neutral ones. More recently, Biel (1990) suggests five ways in which liking of an ad may contribute to advertising effectiveness. Firstly, if an ad is liked, it may enhance its chances of further exposure or processing. Secondly, the ad may constitute a "brand personality attribute". Thirdly, liking may inhibit cognitive activity such as counterarguing with the message; as Biel puts it, we are less likely to quarrel with a friend than an adversary. Fourthly, affect transfer may lead positive reactions to the ad to be automatically associated with the brand. Finally, Biel half-heartedly suggests that liking of an ad may evoke a "gratitude response", in that consumers may try or buy a brand because they appreciated the pleasure provided by the ad.

Turning to the predictive value of Reaction Profiles, Wells (1964 a,b) found that his three dimensions of reactions to print ads related to effectiveness in different ways. For example, "meaningfulness" was correlated more strongly than "attractiveness" with recall, while the reverse was true for recognition. Moldovan (1985) found that of his five factors, only clarity consistently predicted a composite measure of persuasion. Sullivan and O'Connor (1982) found that none of the dimensions from Leavitt's (1975) scale predicted behavioural intentions. However, their study was based on relatively small sample of ads and respondents. More positively, Zinkhan and Burton (1989) found that all factors derived from the Leavitt (1975) scale predicted brand attitude and choice intention. They also found that all of Schlinger's (1979b) factors helped to predict brand attitude, although only the entertainment dimension predicted choice intention. In a similar exercise on the Wells (1964a) and Leavitt (1970) scales, Zinkhan and Fornell (1985) found the two scales equally successful in predicting brand attitudes, but the Wells scale superior in predicting purchasing intentions.

The Advertising Research Foundation recently found that a rating of commercial likability was the single best predictor of sales effectiveness (Biel 1990; Haley and Baldinger 1991). Therefore, several studies have considered the perceptual factors influencing ad liking. Biel and Bridgewater (1990) examined the ability of their five factors to predict ad liking. They found considerable variation across product categories, but overall, the "meaningful" dimension appeared to be the best predictor. The "energy" dimension also consistently explained a significant amount of variance, unlike "ingenuity" and "warmth". The "rubs the wrong way" dimension predicted ad liking in some product categories, but not in others. Using the same data base, but analysing responses at an individual level, Aaker and Stayman (1990) found that the "entertaining", "informative", and "irritating" factors consistently predicted both ad liking and effectiveness. The other six factors were found to predict liking and effectiveness in some cases, but not in others. They had expected a closer relationship to emerge between particular factors and ad effectiveness. For example, they had thought that the "warmth" factor would be the best predictor of effectiveness for "warm" ads. However, they found that it was "difficult, if not impossible" to relate factors to effectiveness in this way. Aaker and Stayman (1990:15-16) conclude that

> ...our implicit search for a regression model that can be applied in a general context or even a limited context, such as a given type of ad, appears to be futile...[and] the search for the ultimate model or diagnostic test based on perceptual factors is likely to be futile.

2.1.2. Reaction Profile research: an assessment

Lutz (1985) describes Reaction Profile research as "atheoretical". Certainly, it has emerged from the pragmatic concerns of practitioners, and its theoretical basis is at best implicit. The work of Biel (1990) and Biel and Bridgewater (1990) appears consistent with the antecedents-state-consequences framework adopted by many consumer behaviour theorists (Bagozzi 1984): ad perceptions are treated as the antecedents of commercial liking, and there are various mechanisms by which commercial liking may be considered to influence consumer behaviour. In general, however, there has been little discussion of dimensions or their implications for effectiveness in terms of advertising or general attitude theory.

There have been some theoretical contributions in this area, however. Not surprisingly, this is where academics have tended to become involved. For example, several academic researchers have examined the predictive, convergent and

divergent validity of various scales. As we have seen, there are mixed findings in terms of the scales' ability to predict effectiveness, and some of the underlying dimensions appear to need more rigorous attention. However, such issues have not interested practitioners, who appear quite satisfied with their scales' "pragmatic validity" (Lastovicka 1983).

The pragmatic orientation of Reaction Profile research has been beneficial in some respects. For example, the immediate and practical value of testing particular ads on a routine, regular basis has yielded extensive databases for considering the dimensions of ad response. Furthermore, the respondents in such research have generally been drawn from the target market for the advertised brands, rather than the student samples used to establish the structure of beliefs about advertising in general. Unfortunately, many of the other problems noted with that research tradition are also evident in Reaction Profile research. It is firmly rooted in an American context, raising concerns about the generalisability of its findings to other cultures. Furthermore, while some of the scales were derived from "consumer verbatims", the general approach has been quantitative and oriented towards measurement. Thus, it appears that there is a need for qualitative exploration of consumer reactions, in order to obtain a richer, deeper understanding of an area which this research indicates is rich and complex.

2.2. Academic perspectives: attitude toward the ad

In contrast to the "atheoretical" nature of practitioners' Reaction Profile research, academic studies of "attitude toward the ad" (Aad) have explicitly drawn on a wide range of theories concerning information processing, involvement, and attitudes. Two studies published in 1981 are generally credited with stimulating research on Aad.

Shimp (1981) distinguished between advertising approaches based on "ATTB" (attitude to the brand) and those based on "ATTA" (attitude to the ad). The ATTB approach tries to influence brand choice by evoking favourable brand attitudes, based on positive brand attribute beliefs. The ATTA approach, rather than influencing beliefs, tries to create a positive attitude towards the ad itself. While Shimp argued that Aad had cognitive and emotional components, his paper focused on its emotional dimension. He suggested that under conditions of limited information processing, and in the absence of prior brand experience, consumers'

attitudes to an ad may mediate their attitudes to the advertised brand though a process of affect referral. Such a process is consistent with classical conditioning theory, in that the ad may be considered an unconditioned stimulus, and the brand a conditioned one.

Similarly, Mitchell and Olson (1981) wondered whether beliefs were the sole mediator of brand attitude in advertising contexts, as suggested by Fishbein and Azjen's (1975) theory of attitude formation, or whether mechanisms such as classical conditioning had a role to play. They conducted a set of student experiments involving "mockup" print ads for fictitious brands of facial tissue. After seeing the ads, students completed a questionnaire eliciting brand attribute beliefs, ad and brand attitudes, and purchase attitudes and intentions. As expected, brand attribute beliefs were a major mediator of brand attitudes. However they were not the sole mediator, as Aad also appeared to play a significant role. Thus, it appeared that an ad did not necessarily have to change beliefs in order to be effective, as it may work through classical conditioning.

Practitioner-led studies had long pointed to the importance of consumers' response to ads themselves. However, Shimp and Mitchell and Olson placed this issue firmly on the academic agenda. They indicated that Aad mediated brand attitudes, suggested mechanisms by which this might happen, and called for further research.

A great deal of research has subsequently been conducted on Aad, much of it in recent years. Brown and Stayman (1992) report that of the 60 research papers which they found on the topic, only nine had been published prior to 1985, while 30 had appeared since 1987. As Aad research has expanded, it has followed the "traditional empirical agenda" by focusing on antecedents and consequences (Bagozzi 1984). That approach is also adopted here, but first debates surrounding the nature of Aad are considered.

2.2.1. The nature of attitude toward the ad

Uncertainty has surrounded the Aad construct since its introduction. Mitchell and Olson observed that the interpretation of their results depended on the meaning of Aad. Thus, if Aad is conceptually distinct from brand attitudes and beliefs, their results contradict Fishbein and Ajzen by suggesting that brand attitudes may be influenced through classical conditioning or affect transfer. However, if Aad is a surrogate for unmeasured brand attribute beliefs, or an evaluation of a brand's

"advertisement attribute", their findings could fit into the Fishbein and Azjen framework. Shimp (1981:10) rejected the view that an ad may be a component of a brand, arguing that

> ...the lumping together of a brand's advertisement with "real" product features would represent a crude combination...

However, such a combination may be seen as intellectually sophisticated rather than crude. Indeed, where brand image is important, it has great intuitive appeal. For example, Clark (1989:26) cites Mike Detsiny, former marketing director for Allied Breweries. Referring to the similarity between competing brands of lager, Detsiny maintained that "the consumer is literally drinking the advertising, and the advertising is the brand".

The Aad concept continues to be characterised by a lack of clarity. Madden et al (1988) refer to its "theoretical vagueness", pointing out that when research addresses the mediation of one construct on another, construct validity becomes a crucial issue. They argue (Madden et al 1985, 1988) that while attitudes to ads and brands may be conceptually distinct, they cannot always be distinguished empirically. Furthermore, significant associations between Aad and brand attitude (required if Aad is to mediate) may be attributed to method variance, as studies of Aad's effect on brand attitude tend to measure both constructs with similar or identical scales.

The most contentious aspect of the Aad concept, however, concerns its dimensionality. Once again, the debate can be traced back to the pioneers: Shimp (1981) referred to Aad as having cognitive and emotional dimensions, while Mitchell and Olson (1981) saw it in terms of one evaluative dimension.

Since then, many studies have interpreted Aad as one-dimensional, although there has been no consensus about the nature of that dimension. Thus, researchers such as Gardner (1985a), Laczniak and Carlson (1989) and Mittal (1990) have implicitly or explicitly measured Aad in terms of a single affective or evaluative dimension. Others, such as Edell and Burke (1986) and Muehling et al (1990) have treated Aad as having one affective dimension, although they have not necessarily measured it in those terms. For example, some studies have referred to Aad in terms of global affect, but included measures of interest (Lutz et al 1983; MacKenzie et al 1986; Homer 1990), believability and convincingness (MacKenzie and Lutz 1982).

A view of Aad as one-dimensional and related to global affect or evaluation is consistent with much of the general literature on attitudes. Many researchers have treated attitudes as relatively stable, lasting, unitary and global evaluations (Millar and Tesser 1990; Breckler and Wiggins 1991). Indeed, according to Fishbein (1981:1)

> ...despite the complexity with which it's often been defined, attitude is now generally viewed as a fairly simple construct that refers to the amount of affect for or against an object.

However, alternatives to such one-dimensional definitions of attitudes have been advanced. The work of Mitchell and Olson (1981) may be used in support of such a case, although they saw Aad as one-dimensional and "evaluative". They initially used a seven-item rating scale to measure Aad, and factor analysis identified two dimensions. The four items loading onto the "evaluative" dimension were then treated as Aad. The other three items were inexplicably abandoned, although they seem consistent with the "meaningful" dimension found in several Reaction Profile studies. More explicit support for a multi-dimensional Aad construct comes from Shimp (1981) and Muehling (1986), who refer to cognitive and affective dimensions. Building on the work of Batra and Ahtola (1991), Olney et al (1991) measured Aad in terms of hedonic, utilitarian, and interest dimensions.

Further support for a multi-dimensional treatment of Aad is found in the more general literature on attitudes. Foxall (1980) notes that most social scientists treat attitudes as multidimensional or tripartite, with cognitive, affective and conative elements. According to Cohen and Areni (1991), affect has typically been treated as the evaluative component of a tripartite system, or as synonymous with attitude. To avoid such confusion, they suggest that attitudes be treated as an evaluative judgment, with "affect" used to represent a valenced feeling state.

While Fishbein and Ajzen consider attitude to be an affective state with cognitive antecedents, others have argued that affect is precognitive. In a provocative article, Zajonc (1980:154) argues that

> The form of experience that we came to call feeling accompanies all cognitions...it arises early in the process of registration and retrieval, albeit weakly and vaguely, and...derives from a parallel, separate, and partly independent system in the organism.

Thus, our early affective reactions may be "gross and vague", but they can influence our cognitive processing, perhaps leading to more refined feelings. Van Raaij (1989) adopts this perspective in his model of consumers' reaction to advertising

incorporating a "primary affective reaction" stage between attention and cognitive elaboration.

Others have argued that attitudes and their antecedents are more complex than Fishbein and Ajzen suggest. For example, Ennis (1989, in Zanna 1990:99) argues that beliefs may be symbolic as well as utilitarian or instrumental. Millar and Tesser (1990) maintain that at any given moment, we have the potential for a number of different attitudes towards an object. Some of these may be based on feelings, others on beliefs, and their relative salience may depend on contextual factors. Similarly, Zanna (1990) argues that different information sources may have different implications for an overall evaluation, leading to ambivalent attitudes.

In general, then, it seems that different views about the dimensionality of Aad may be reconciled somewhat by treating Aad as a global evaluation with various antecedents. Indeed, Brown and Stayman's (1992) recent meta-analysis of Aad research offered support for cognitive and affective antecedents. The next section, then, examines research on the antecedents of Aad.

2.2.2. The antecedents of attitude toward the ad

MacKenzie and Lutz (1989) propose five primary antecedents of Aad: ad credibility, ad perceptions, attitude to the advertiser, attitude to advertising, and mood. **Ad credibility** is the extent to which consumers believe claims about a brand. This was thought to be determined by perceived discrepancies in an ad's claims, and by credibility of the advertiser and advertising in general. It could be considered a special case of **ad perceptions**, defined as the multidimensional array of consumer perceptions of an ad rather than the brand. These were thought to be determined by an ad's executional characteristics, and by consumers' attitudes to the advertiser and to advertising. **Attitudes to the advertiser** were thought to result from cumulative perceptions, information and experience and **attitudes to advertising** were thought to result from perceptions of advertising in general. Finally, **mood** referred to the consumer's affective state at the time of exposure to the ad. This was thought to be influenced by an ad's executional characteristics, its reception context, and individual differences. Its influence on Aad was thought to be direct by association, or indirect through some cognitive processing.

Much Aad research has examined the influence of such factors on consumers' attitudes to particular ads. Turning first to cognitive factors, MacKenzie and Lutz

asked students to evaluate an ad for a fictitious watch from a real manufacturer, telling them that brand evaluations were irrelevant. The authors suggested that under these "ad pre-test" conditions, ad credibility and perceptions would have the greatest influence on Aad, as executional elements would be processed carefully. These perceptions were elicited through a thought-listing procedure immediately after exposure to the ad. Rating scales measured attitudes to the ad, brand and advertising in general, and the perceived credibility of the advertiser and advertising in general.

MacKenzie and Lutz found that ad-specific antecedents appeared to explain more variance in Aad. For example, attitude to the advertiser was a stronger determinant of ad perceptions and Aad than the more general attitude to advertising. Similarly, the effect of advertising credibility on ad credibility was mediated by the more specific advertiser credibility factor. Muehling's (1986) research also underlines the importance of ad-specific antecedents. He found that attitudes to advertising in general had little influence on Aad. However, attitudes to comparative advertising were more strongly correlated with attitudes to a comparative ad.

The thought-listing method for measuring consumers' cognitive responses has been widely used in Aad research. According to Cacioppo and Petty (1981:310) cognitive responses are

> ...those thoughts that pass through a person's mind as he or she anticipates, receives, or reflects upon a message designed to change beliefs, attitudes or behavior.

An early advertising application of this approach was reported by Wright (1973). He examined whether consumers' spontaneous responses to ads mediated their acceptance of messages. His research involved exposing respondents to a simulated print or radio ad, and asking them to list the thoughts they had during their exposure to the ad. He proposed that such thoughts could be classified in terms of three conceptually distinct modes of response, namely support arguments, counterarguments, and source derogations. He also referred to curiosity statements, but did not incorporate these into his analysis.

Support arguments were generated when incoming information was found to be consistent with an individual's existing belief system. **Counterarguments** occurred when the information was inconsistent, and these neutralised or countered evidence presented in an ad. Within these two categories, only thoughts directed towards the idea or use of the advertised product were allowed. Statements of liking or disliking the product were specifically excluded, as were other emotional responses.

Source derogations formed the third category. Like counterarguments, these were seen as a resistive response, but they focused on the source rather than the content of information. Included in this category were thoughts of distrust or derogation of ads or the advertisers, or those expressing "dislike for the overall means used by the advertiser in the presentation" (Wright 1973:62). Finally, **curiosity statements** expressed interest in obtaining further information about the product.

As these categories offer a very restricted array of responses, others have expanded on Wright's framework. For example, Olson et al (1982) added neutral thoughts and positive and negative ad-related thoughts. More recently, Aaker et al (1992) refer to counterarguments, support arguments, execution bolstering and execution derogation. The first two address an ad's argument, logic, content or conclusion, and the last two refer to an ad's style, quality or spokesperson, or the context or situation depicted.

Table 2.5. presents the cognitive response categories used by Aad researchers. For the purposes of this research, it is disappointing to note that these studies focus on the structure rather than the substance of responses, so that little insight is offered into the range, depth or richness of consumers' response to ads.

The scope as well as the depth of these studies appears to be limited. Cacioppo and Petty (1981) reviewed cognitive response research in the more general area of attitude change. They found that the three most common categorisations concerned the polarity, target, and origin of cognitive responses. Polarity refers to the degree to which the response is in favour of or opposed to an aspect of the object. The target is the object of the response, such as a stimulus, source, recipient, or channel. Finally, the origin is the primary source of the information contained in a response: it may originate externally or internally, or be modified from an external source. The categories presented in Table 2.5. vary in polarity and generally focus on several targets, usually brand-related arguments and ad execution. In terms of origin, however, they focus on thoughts which are externally generated, or at best modified from an external source. Given that these researchers are concerned with advertising response, this is hardly surprising. However, as Shavitt and Brock (1986) point out, the self is a key element in any analysis of consumer persuasion. They argue that it should be incorporated explicitly into cognitive response categories, in terms of target as well as origin. Such a perspective is not evident in Aad research, although Batra's (1984) framework focuses more on the self than do the others.

TABLE 2.5. COGNITIVE RESPONSE CATEGORIES USED IN AAD RESEARCH

Study	Categories	Referring to:
MacKenzie & Lutz(1982)	Brand	supported/unsupported brand evaluations
	Ad idea	supported/unsupported evaluations of idea
	Ad execution	evaluation of executional qualities
	(+/-)	
Lutz & MacKenzie (1982) MacKenzie & Lutz (1983)	Speaker-directed	supported/unsupported/curiosity thoughts about speaker in ad
	Manufacturer-directed	supported/unsupported/curiosity thoughts about manufacturer
	Product-directed	supported/unsupported/curiosity thoughts about advertised product
	Ad idea-directed	supported/unsupported/curiosity thoughts about ideas expressed in ad
	(+/-)	
Lutz et al (1983)	Ad	physical qualities of the ad itself
	Brand	advertised brand and its attributes
	(+/-)	
Batra (1984) Batra & Ray (1986)	Support argument	brand affirmation, desire to try, positive message misunderstanding
	Counter-argument	disaffirmation, negative misunderstanding
	Execution discounting	negative reaction to ad execution style, elements, credibility
	Execution bolstering	positive reaction to ad execution style, elements, credibility
	SEVA	reports of upbeat feelings: surgency, elation, vigour, or activation
	Social affectation	reports of warm, tender feelings
	Deactivation	relaxing, soothing feelings, etc.
	Neutral distractor	curiosity/surprise at ad execution, neutral thoughts
	Other	ad content playback, later thoughts
Gardner (1985)	Ad	anything related to the ad itself
	Brand	anything related to the advertised brand
Mitchell (1986)	Product attribute	any description of product
	Product evaluation	overall evaluation of the product
	Ad statement	any description of ad
	Ad evaluation	overall evaluation of ad
MacKenzie et al (1986)	**Ad cognitions**:	
	Source derogation	as used by Wright (1973)
	Source bolstering	positive response to advertiser/approach
	Positive repetition	favourable reference to prior exposure
	Negative repetition	unfavourable reference to prior exposure
	Positive execution	favourable comment on ad execution
	Negative execution	unfavourable comment on ad execution

Key: (+): positive thoughts (-): negative thoughts (=): neutral thoughts

TABLE 2.5 CTD.

Study	Categories	Referring to:
MacKenzie et al (ctd.)	**Brand cognitions**:	
	Counterargument	as used by Wright (1973)
	Support argument	as used by Wright (1973)
	Irrelevant	not discussed
	All others	curiosity, neutral, (dis)affirmation
Mitchell (1988)	**Product thoughts:**	
	Support arguments	as used by Wright (1973)
	Counterarguments	as used by Wright (1973)
	Ad thoughts:	
	Positive statements	positive evaluations of ad or ad element
	Negative statements	negative evaluations of ad or ad element
Hastak & Olson (1989)	Support arguments	Not discussed
	Counterarguments	Not discussed
	Positive ad-related	Not discussed
	Negative ad-related	Not discussed
	Curiosity	Not discussed
	Neutral	Not discussed
MacKenzie & Lutz (1989) MacKenzie & Spreng (1992)	Ad execution	ad qualities: visuals, style, text, etc.
	Brand	brand or its attributes
	Advertiser	manufacturer of the ad
	Research study	experimental task itself
	Irrelevant	other (excluded from analysis)
	(+/=/-)	
Homer (1990)	Counterargument	Not discussed
	Support argument	Not discussed
	Positive ad execution	Not discussed
	Negative ad execution	Not discussed
	Source derogation	Not discussed
Muehling et al (1990)	Claims	specific claims made in ad
	Product	subject of ad: product class or brand
	Ad execution	style, execution, theme, format, visuals
	Other	test environment, distractions
	(+/-)	
Chattopadhyay & Nedungadi (1992)	Ad-directed	Not discussed
	Brand-directed	Not discussed

Key: (+): positive thoughts (-): negative thoughts (=): neutral thoughts

A further perspective on the limitations of research in this area is offered by Muehling et al (1990:96-97), who observe that

> Some of the apparent confusion about the nature of Aad would appear to be the result of an unduly restrictive definition of cognitive processes. As is widely recognised in the psychological literature, "cognitive" does not necessarily mean rational or deliberative...cognitive researchers are increasingly drawn to the less than rational and seemingly mindless nature of many responses.

While positive or negative evaluations of ad executions may be considered "affective", there is little, again with the exception of Batra's (1984) framework, which addresses the less rational or deliberative aspects of ad response. This seems particularly unfortunate, as Reaction Profile research, for example, suggests that the hedonic aspects of advertising are important. Recently, however, Machleit and Wilson (1988: 27-28) suggest that

> ...the narrow focus of examining attitude toward an advertisement is now expanding; researchers are beginning to consider the emotional feelings experienced during advertising exposure as a different type of response.

Leckenby and Stout (1985) suggest that the 1916 work of Munsterberg on film aesthetics might be useful to advertising researchers. He distinguished between depictive feelings, which related to perceptions of emotions in others, and participative feelings, which were more empathetic and experiential for the audience. While this seems a useful distinction, advertising research has also addressed emotional responses in other ways.

Gardner's (1985b) review of the literature on mood states provides some insights into the ways in which feelings may influence Aad. She describes moods as general, pervasive and transient feeling states which are less intense, attention-getting and behaviour-specific than emotions. Moods appear to bias evaluations and judgments in the direction of the prevalent mood state; for example, if we are in a negative mood, we are more likely to retrieve unfavourable material from memory and evaluate things negatively. Gardner suggests that moods may be induced by ads themselves, or by the material preceding them. If positive moods are induced, a brand may be regarded more favourably through affect transfer, or through the learning, integration and acquisition of material favourable to the brand. Indeed, Batra and Stayman (1990) found that students in a positive mood engaged in less, but more favourable cognitive elaboration on a print ad than those in a neutral mood. Mitchell (1988) found that students' mood had no effect on their cognitive response to an ad, but in general, according to Isen (1989:113),

> ...the evidence suggests that rather than causing people not to think, affect (at least some affects) can influence thought by influencing what people think about, how they relate things to one another...

Several advertising researchers have drawn on the psychological literature in examining a range of emotional responses to ads. For example, Zeitlin and Westwood (1986) and Holbrook and Westwood (1989) based their research on Plutchik's theory of emotion. He argued that there are eight primary emotions: anticipation, surprise, disgust, anger, fear, sadness, joy and acceptance. As is the case with colours, all other emotions may be described as some combination of those primary ones. Unfortunately, Zeitlin and Westwood (1986:39) did not actually examine emotional responses to ads, but measured consumers' "cognitive appraisals of the advertisement...in a language based on subjective feelings". Holbrook and Westwood (1989) examined emotional responses directly, and found that Plutchik's framework could be applied to advertising responses. Similarly, Allen et al (1988) examined the relevance of Izard's ten emotion types to advertising. These consisted of interest, joy, surprise, sadness, anger, disgust, contempt, fear, shame and guilt. They found that Izard's scales captured students' emotional response to ads, with joy, interest, surprise, and disgust/contempt being the most commonly reported feelings. Allen et al conclude that there is a "diverse and sophisticated emotional experience" associated with advertising, which should be examined using tailor-made rather than borrowed concepts and research instruments. In this context, Holbrook and Batra (1988) developed a Standardised Emotional Profile, consisting of 27 items, to measure emotional responses to ads.

In addition to classifying emotions, several studies have related such responses to Aad. Batra and Ray (1986) examined whether three categories of affective response influenced Aad independently of cognitive responses. The categories were deactivation, social affectation, and SEVA (feelings of surgency, elation, vigour or activation). Respondents wrote down their thoughts and feelings after seeing several television ads. Overall, 13% of responses were classified as "affective". The three categories were significant predictors of Aad, and their effect on brand attitudes was mediated by Aad, indicating that affective responses are antecedents of Aad.

Edell and Burke (1987) also demonstrated that feelings generated by an ad made a unique contribution to Aad. They used adjective checklists to obtain respondents' feelings and judgments concerning prime-time television ads, and factor analysed the responses. Three feelings factors emerged and were labelled "upbeat", "negative"

and "warm". There were also three judgement factors, referring to "evaluation", "activity" and "gentleness". Edell and Burke (1987: 430) observe that

> ...more people agree about whether an ad is believable or amusing than about how an ad makes them feel...Feelings appear to be properties of the individual, while judgements of the ad's characteristics appear to be properties of the ad.

Feelings made a significant and independent contribution to explaining variance in Aad and brand attitude. They were also found to influence Aad indirectly, through ad judgments and brand beliefs. Edell and Burke (1987:431) conclude that as

> ...a part of the affective system influences the cognitive system...elements of the persuasion process may be incredibly entangled

Several other studies highlight the complexity of emotional responses to ads. For example, Balasubramanian (1990) and Aaker et al (1986) found that affective responses varied during the one exposure to an ad. Stayman and Aaker (1988) found that the relationship between feelings and Aad changed with repetition. Thus, during initial exposures to an ad, students' feelings had a direct impact on their brand attitudes. With subsequent exposures, however, feelings appeared to become attached to Aad, so that it mediated their effect on brand attitude. The work of Holbrook and Batra (1987), Olney et al (1991), and Cho and Stout (1993) also indicates the importance of various emotional dimensions as antecedents of Aad, and the complex interactions between cognitive and affective elements and Aad.

Just as researchers appear to have recognised the importance and complexity of affective factors in Aad formation, Bone and Ellen (1992) announce the emergence of another neglected, complex and apparently multidimensional antecedent. Their work (also reported in Bone and Ellen 1990, and Ellen and Bone 1991) focuses on imagery as opposed to cognitive or affective processes. Following MacInnis and Price (1987), Bone and Ellen define imagery as the representation of any sensory experience in working memory. They point out that such sensory experiences are not necessarily visual, and may range from the vague and fleeting to the rich and engrossing.

The authors developed a set of radio ads, in which the announcer instructed the audience to imagine one of several scenarios. In addition to measures of Aad and brand attitude, several measures of the imagery processes experienced by respondents were obtained. Factor analysis of the imagery scales yielded two dimensions. One was labelled "vividness", and the other referred to the

"quantity/ease" of images generated. Neither imagery factor was found to influence brand attitude, but both influenced Aad, which had in turn a significant effect on brand attitude. Not surprisingly, the authors conclude that further research attention should be directed towards the dimensionality of imagery and its impact on Aad. Indeed, if we accept that attitudes have a hedonic dimensions (Batra and Ahtola 1991; Olney et al 1991), and that at least some consumer behaviour is motivated by hedonism (Holbrook and Hirschman 1982; Hirschman 1985), it does not seem surprising that consumer-generated advertising imagery may influence Aad formation.

One final perspective on the antecedents of Aad is provided by Katz's functional theory of attitudes in general. Interested in the motivational rather than cognitive structure of attitudes, Katz argued that people may like or dislike something with equal intensity, but for very different reasons. Thus, to understand or influence people's attitudes, it is necessary to understand the function or functions which attitudes serve for them (Locander and Spivey 1978; Lutz 1979).

Katz suggested four classes of attitude functions. Firstly, attitudes may serve a utilitarian purpose: we develop positive attitudes towards objects which we find rewarding. Secondly, they may serve a knowledge function, as they may help us to understand our world. Thus, we may develop positive attitudes towards objects which reduce ambiguity or uncertainty, or which satisfy our sense of curiosity. Thirdly, attitudes may serve a value-expressive function: we hold positive attitudes towards objects which help us to express our central values or self-concept. Finally, Katz suggests that attitudes may also serve an ego-defensive function, as they may help us to protect ourselves from external threats or a sense of our own inadequacies. To these four, Lutz (1979) adds the social adjustment function, in that attitudes may serve to maintain, assist, or disrupt our relations with others. Clearly, the utilitarian function may be accommodated within cognitive frameworks, but the others offer further support for multi-dimensional antecedents of Aad.

Thus, a range of cognitive, affective, functional and imagery dimensions may be considered as antecedents of Aad. No study has addresses all four of these categories, and even among those focusing on one, there is no consensus as to the nature of the dimensions involved. Furthermore, as Lutz (1985) has suggested, we should not expect all antecedents to be equally influential across all situations. Indeed, their relative importance (and Aad itself) have been found to vary according to the type of advertising appeal (Chattopadhyay and Nedungadi (1990, 1992) levels

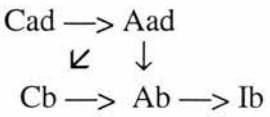
of repetition, (Burke and Edell 1986; Cox and Cox 1988) and consumers' prior brand knowledge and attitudes (Machleit and Wilson 1988; Machleit et al 1993).

2.2.3. The consequences of attitude toward the ad

While the focus of this study is not on the marketing effects of consumers' relationship with ads, research on the consequences of Aad is of some interest as it addresses consumer processing of ads. Olney et al (1991) have recently found that the hedonic and interest dimensions of Aad positively affected the viewing time devoted to ads, while the utilitarian dimension had a negative effect. Most Aad research, however, has addressed its impact on brand attitudes.

Mitchell and Olson (1981) and Shimp (1981) suggested several ways in which Aad may influence brand attitudes. However, Lutz and his colleagues have set the agenda for research in this area. They tested various models of Aad's effects on brand attitudes (MacKenzie and Lutz 1982, 1983; Lutz et al 1983; MacKenzie et al 1986). The following discussion focuses on the last of these articles, as it is the most widely cited and detailed account of their work. MacKenzie et al (1986) conducted two separate experiments concerning consumers' response to simulated television ads for a fictitious brand of toothpaste. In both experiments, their Dual Mediation Hypothesis (Figure 2.1) was found to have the greatest predictive ability. This proposes that ad cognitions influence Aad, that brand cognitions influence brand attitude, and that brand attitude in turn influences purchasing intentions.

It also incorporates a direct and one-way causal flow from Aad to brand attitude, consistent with classical conditioning theory. Finally, it proposes that Aad affects brand attitude by influencing brand cognitions, perhaps by increasing consumers' motivation to process brand attribute information.



Key: Cad: ad cognitions
Aad: attitude to the ad
Ib : intention to purchase brand
Cb: brand cognitions
Ab: brand attitude

Figure 2.1. The Dual Mediation Hypothesis

Source: S.B. MacKenzie, R.J. Lutz, and G.E. Belch (1986), "The role of attitude toward the ad as a mediator of advertising effectiveness: a test of competing explanations", Journal of Marketing Research, 23, May, p.131

The Dual Mediation Hypothesis did not fit the data exactly, hower. Aad was found to exert a strong positive influence on brand attitude. It also had some positive influence on brand cognitions. However, brand cognitions did not appear to influence brand attitude. MacKenzie et al suggest that this reflects perceptions of toothpaste as a trivial purchase, with perceived brand attributes contributing little to brand attitude. However, an earlier study examining response to car ads (MacKenzie and Lutz 1982, 1983) also found the link between brand cognitions and attitude insignificant.

Other research has largely supported the Dual Mediation Hypothesis. Indeed, the Brown and Stayman (1992) meta-analysis endorsed the model in general, and the brand cognitions/brand attitude link in particular. Homer (1990) argues that the weak link found by MacKenzie et al between brand cognitions and attitude may be due to methodological aspects of their study. Her modified study, using real print and television ads, supported the Dual Mediation Hypothesis and identified a significant link between brand cognitions and attitude. Mittal (1991) offers another perspective, suggesting that the link between brand cognitions and attitudes may be understated when only utilitarian cognitions are measured. He measured image-based as well as utilitarian brand attribute beliefs. When image-related beliefs were taken into account, brand cognitions exerted greater influence on brand attitude, with a corresponding decrease in Aad's influence. Mittal argues that his study raises further questions about the nature of Aad and its relationship with brand beliefs. Thus, consumers may like an ad because of its executional elements, and image-related brand inferences may be made from those elements; for example, an entertaining ad

may suggest that a brand has "fun" qualities. This view is hardly new, as Mitchell and Olson (1981) discussed the "advertisement attribute" of brands.

2.2.4. Academic research: an assessment

While academic research on attitudes to ads can hardly be described as "atheoretical", it appears to share some of the limitations of practitioner research, and to possess others as well. Thus, in common with the practitioner studies, Aad research is grounded in an American culture and tradition, and appears more concerned with measuring and classifying responses than exploring or understanding them. In common with research on beliefs about advertising in general, Aad studies have relied heavily on student respondents. For example, of the 46 studies included in the Brown and Stayman meta-analysis, 36 used student samples.

Overall, the research approach adopted in many studies may be described as derivative, incremental, and experimental. Many of the measures used have been adopted or adapted from earlier studies, and a great deal of attention has been devoted to refining particular aspects of predictive models. Concern has also been expressed about the experimental nature of much research in this area. For example, Allen and Madden (1989) question the ecological validity of Aad and other academic advertising research studies: they point out that the artificial situation created by experiments may differ from day-to-day reality in important ways, so that the results may be irrelevant. In this context, MacKenzie and Lutz (1989:48) qualify the significance of Aad's mediating role to "the typical laboratory-type experimental settings in which most advertising pre-testing takes place". However, most British copytesting does not take place in such settings (Jobber and Kilbride 1986). Furthermore, the term "experimental settings" hardly begins to suggest the artificial nature of much Aad research. For example, MacKenzie and Lutz (1989) explicitly instructed students to divorce ad attitudes from brand evaluations. Furthermore, the authors report that before being given three minutes to list their thoughts,

> The developmental sample subjects were permitted to examine the stimulus print advertisement for two minutes and then were instructed to turn the ad face down and place it on their desks...(p55).

Similarly, Homer (1990:83) states that in one of her experiments, "subjects [were] isolated by partitioned walls to prevent awareness of others' behavior". Mittal's (1990:211) study was conducted in large theatre, where

> A slide-and-synchronized-audio-pod was prepared from a set of "synthetic" print ads...[which were] transformed into full-view and sectional...slides so that the text on the sectional slides was readable on the screen.

Indeed, the widespread use of artificial stimuli has caused Thorson (1990:200-201) to observe that

> A crucial but sadly unexamined question must precede any talk of theory, concepts and methodology: What constitutes an ad? ...is a line drawing of a ball-point pen with eight product attributes typed below it an ad? Are three long paragraphs extolling the attributes of an automobile an ad?

She suggests that since research is presumably intended to understand how people respond to advertising, real ads should be used, rather than stimuli which no-one regards as advertising.

In general, then, Aad research appears to rely heavily on surrogate consumers providing written responses to simulated ads, and in settings very different from the contexts in which they normally encounter advertising. Furthermore, when Aad research has not treated its "subjects" as homogeneous, it has measured or manipulated a very narrow range of variables. Thus, we do not know whether Aad varies according to consumers' age, gender, social class, or media consumption and preferences. Despite these methodological and conceptual straightjackets, however, Aad research still indicates the richness and complexity of consumers' relationship with ads, and the difficulties of accounting for them with simplistic models.

3. CONCLUSIONS

This chapter has examined the practitioner and academic literature on consumers' attitudes to advertising, at a general level and in terms of particular ads. Research on attitudes to advertising in general has been motivated by managerial and social concerns. The literature indicates that British people are more favourably disposed to advertising than those in other countries, particularly America. However, regardless of national boundaries, the public appears to hold complex and ambivalent attitudes to advertising. Some of these are based on personal experience of ads over time, so that for example advertising is simultaneously considered entertaining and annoying. Others reflect beliefs about advertising at a more impersonal, institutional level, so that it may be considered good for some aspects of the economy, yet problematic in its fostering of materialism or sex-role stereotypes. Research on the dimensionality

of attitudes to advertising in general has been American, although some information pertaining to those dimensions exists within a European context. In general, research on attitudes to advertising is almost exclusively quantitative, with little evidence that issues have been explored before they have been measured.

Consumers' attitudes to particular ads have been examined from a managerial perspective, by practitioners and academics. Here, the published research is almost exclusively American. Both practitioners and academics have been interested in advertising effectiveness, although there has been little interaction between the two groups. Practitioners' "atheoretical" research has focused on quantitative Reaction Profiles to help them choose or improve particular ads. Information on the "underlying dimensionality" of advertising response is to some extent a by-product of this research tradition. While many studies have identified dimensions such as likable, lively, and meaningful, there appears to be great variation in response across individual consumers. Furthermore, while ad liking appears to influence effectiveness, the relative salience of dimensions appears to vary considerably across product categories and advertising styles.

Academic research has focused on the nature, antecedents and consequences of attitude to the ad. It has drawn upon (or become entangled in) many wider theoretical debates such as those concerning attitudes and information-processing. Despite the widespread use of artificial stimuli, student samples, and experimental methods, it once more indicates the complexity of consumers' attitudes to ads. In this context, it is disappointing to note that research has attempted to measure and predict such attitudes, rather than to understand them. As Muehling et al (1990: 97) observe,

> Potentially, a great deal more may be gained by acknowledging how little we know at this point, and by resisting any inclination to restrict the boundaries of this investigation at this relatively early date.

CHAPTER THREE

INVOLVEMENT, ADVERTISING, AND ADVERTISING INVOLVEMENT

All changed, changed utterly:
A terrible beauty is born

W.B. Yeats, "Easter 1916"

These lines should strike a chord in anyone familiar with the diffusion of the involvement concept in the field of consumer behaviour. Few concepts have promised as much, apparently delivered as little, and caused such confusion in the process. Described variously as "the best thing since sliced bread" (Rothschild 1984), "a bag of worms" (Lastovicka and Gardner 1979) and a concept with "a nearly magic meaning" (Rajaniemi and Laaksonen 1986), involvement has certainly induced high levels of arousal in academic circles. This chapter assesses the contribution of involvement theory to an understanding of consumers' experience of advertising. It focuses on the influence of involvement on consumers' response to ads, and on consumers' involvement with ads. Before these issues can be considered, however, it is necessary to examine the concept of involvement itself.

1. THE NATURE OF INVOLVEMENT

There are some common starting-points in various treatments of involvement. It is typically characterised as a sense of personal relevance (Antil 1984; Zaichkowsky 1985; Claeys and Abeele 1992) or a state of arousal (Mitchell 1979; McQuarrie and Munson 1987), with respect to a consumption-related object (such as a brand or purchase decision). Furthermore, involvement is generally thought to increase as its object is more closely tied to an individual's central value system (Ostrom and Brock 1968; Tyebjee 1979).

Defining involvement, however, has long been considered problematic. For example, Rothschild and Houston (1977) bemoaned the "theoretical lipservice" and "shallow empirical treatment" which it had received, and Antil (1984) argued that the concept was not well defined, conceptualised or operationalised. According to Cohen (1983), "a lot of excess baggage" was piled on the term by researchers confusing the state of involvement with its antecedents and consequences. Similarly, Laurent and Kapferer (1985) criticise "circular misusage" of the concept which defines involvement in terms of its alleged consequences, rendering tests of its effects meaningless. Definitional and operational problems with involvement persist (Assael 1987; Costley 1988; Laczniak et al 1989; McWilliam 1991; Claeys and Abeele 1992). Indeed, Andrews et al (1990) list 28 definitions of involvement and numerous experimental attempts to manipulate it. Such confusion may explain why the popularity of involvement appears to be on the wane: according to Muncy (1990), "reviewers and editors are already writing involvement's eulogy".

1.1. Involvement - a mutant construct?

Some definitional differences relate to various objects of involvement. For example, consumers may be involved with purchase or choice decisions (Engel et al 1990), products or brands (McWilliam 1991), fashion (Tigert et al 1979), gift-giving (Belk 1981), media or advertising (Krugman 1965, 1966-7), television programmes (Lloyd and Clancy 1991), or even experimental tasks (Zimbardo 1960). While the existence of different objects of involvement is intuitively appealing, Rajaniemi and Laaksonen (1986) note that the content of involvement definitions tends to change with the object. If the nature of involvement has indeed been mutated to fit various objects, this may help to explain why it has been such an elusive concept.

Other distinctions found in the involvement literature do not explicitly refer to different objects of involvement. As Costley (1988) observes, conceptualisations also differ in content, dimensions, and intensity. Indeed, involvement has been categorised as high or low (Krugman 1965; Kassarjian 1980; Finn 1982, 1983), cognitive or affective (Vaughn 1980; Park and Young 1986), experienced or expressed (Poiesz and Peters 1987), enduring or instrumental (Bloch and Richins 1983). Others have distinguished between situational, enduring or response involvement (Houston and Rothschild 1977, 1978), situational, product or enduring involvement (Smith and Beattie 1984) and between ego, response, and

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communication involvement, commitment, and purchase importance (Muncy and Hunt 1984). Underlying these various treatments, however, there seem to be three distinct interpretations of involvement, each suggesting different priorities for research.

1.2. Three interpretations of involvement

Firstly, involvement might be a single, unitary construct, whose nature has been mutated and obscured by inconsistent applications in particular situations. If this is the case, researchers should clean the basic, general-purpose construct of its contaminated past, and develop valid, reliable measures. This is essentially what Zaichkowsky (1985) attempted with her Personal Involvement Inventory scale. She defined involvement in terms of personal relevance, and offered 20 bipolar items as a unidimensional measure. Mitchell (1979:194) also offers a unitary interpretation, defining involvement as

> ...an individual level, **state** variable that measures the amount of arousal or interest in a stimulus object or situation.

Other researchers, including Cohen (1983), McQuarrie and Munson (1987) and Mittal (1989), have also defined involvement as a state of arousal. Others have challenged state definitions, however, arguing that they simply displace established, well-developed concepts such as "arousal" or "interest" (Rajaniemi and Laaksonen 1986; Costley 1988). Furthermore, Rajaniemi and Laaksonen argue that such definitions tend to view involvement as an actualised rather than latent state of arousal. Thus, it appears as a composite mediating variable, incorporating all internal and external determinants of behaviour. Such determinants cannot then be recognised as influencing behaviour directly, nor can the state of involvement be disentangled from its antecedents.

These researchers favour cognitive approaches, based on the perceived personal importance of objects or activities. They define involvement as the strength of an object's linking with a consumer's self-concept, central values and motives: the more complex an attitude structure, the higher the level of involvement. According to Rajaniemi and Laaksonen, this allows involvement to be seen as an enduring phenomenon which is one of several variables potentially influencing behaviour: it is not a channel through which all other potential mediators need to pass.

A second broad interpretation of involvement is as multidimensional phenomenon. If this view is taken, the priority for research is to assess the dimensionality of involvement as well as its level. Various scales have been developed, discussed and refined in this context. Those scales which have received most attention in the literature however, were developed by Zaichkowsky (1985) and Laurent and Kapferer (1985).

Zaichkowsky's scale was designed to measure involvement as a one-dimensional construct. However, McQuarrie and Munson (1987) note that several of her items do not simply refer to "personal relevance": some appear to capture attitudes rather than involvement, and others seem to tap a hedonic dimension. Indeed, Zaichkowsky (1987) has subsequently suggested that her scale be modified to incorporate an emotional dimension. Kapferer and Laurent (1985,1985-86; Laurent and Kapferer 1985), explicitly set out to measure involvement as multi-faceted. Their Involvement Profile scale was derived from interviews with consumers and advertising managers as well as a review of the involvement literature. It measured five facets of involvement:

1. the perceived importance of a product
2. perceived risk associated with its purchase, in terms of the perceived severity of negative consequences of a poor choice, and
3. the perceived probability of making a poor choice
4. the symbolic or sign value of a product, its use or purchase
5. the hedonic, emotional or pleasure value of a product

Kapferer and Laurent administered their Involvement Profile to French consumers, covering a wide range of product categories. Their factor analysis suggested that the five facets were not independent, and could not fully predict each other. Furthermore, Laurent and Kapferer (1985:45) suggest that the full profile should always be investigated, as

> ...no single facet alone catches the richness of the relationship between a consumer and a product class.

Indeed, different facets of involvement were found to influence various aspects of consumer behaviour in different ways. For example, the pleasure facet influenced advertising exposure, but not the extensiveness of choice processes. Thus, they suggested, reducing Involvement Profile results to a single score in order to predict

behaviour would be meaningless.

Although similar factors to the Involvement Profile were identified by Jain and Srinivasan (1990) and McQuarrie and Munson (1987), the work of Laurent and Kapferer has not escaped criticism. Firstly, as Mittal and Lee (1988) point out, perceived importance and hedonic value appear to address product category involvement, while perceived risk and sign value may be more closely related to brand choice. In Cohen's (1983) terms, the Involvement Profile addresses the **antecedents** of involvement. As Mittal (1989) and Rajaniemi and Laaksonen point out, Laurent and Kapferer define involvement in terms of those antecedents, bypassing the state of involvement. Mittal suggests that it is the antecedents of involvement which are multidimensional, not the state. He also suggests that the antecedents be categorised as utilitarian or psychosocial. As we have seen in Chapter Two, similar arguments have been advanced with respect to attitudes.

A third interpretation is that involvement is neither multidimensional nor a unidimensional concept, but rather a loose collective term for quite disparate mediating variables. Indeed, Rajaniemi and Laaksonen (1986) wonder whether the various treatments of involvement really reflect some underlying concept, or whether they are distinct concepts in themselves. Similarly, Batra and Ray (1983a) refer to "qualitatively different" forms of involvement.

On a pragmatic level, Rothschild (1984) complained that the "constant recompartmentalisation" of the concept was blocking empirical research. More recently, Zaichkowsky (1990) has expressed frustration that consumer researchers seem more concerned with measuring involvement than relating it to consumer behaviour. The next section examines research which has attempted to relate involvement to consumers' response to advertising.

2. INVOLVEMENT AND ADVERTISING RESPONSE

Social psychologists Johnson and Eagly (1989) recently conducted a meta-analysis of research on involvement and persuasion. The authors noted that the persuasion literature treated involvement in three distinct ways, according to the aspect of the self-concept activated. Thus, involvement may be relevant to our enduring values, our ability to obtain desirable outcomes, or to the impression made on others. Each

type of involvement appeared to have different implications for persuasion. **Value-relevant involvement** generally appeared to inhibit persuasion, although strong arguments facilitated some attitude change. In the case of **outcome-relevant involvement**, strong arguments appeared to be persuasive, although weak arguments did not necessarily inhibit attitude change. Finally, limited research on **impression-relevant involvement** suggested that it might inhibit persuasion slightly.

In an advertising context, Burnkrant and Sawyer (1983), Zaichkowsky (1986), Harris (1987) and Andrews et al (1990) have all noted that the variety of interpretations given to involvement confounds assessment of its effects. Furthermore, as Muhlbacher (1986:464) has pointed out,

> The advertised product category, the brand, the purchase decision and consumption (usage) process, the executional framework of the advertisement, the media vehicle as well as parts of the situative context may evoke a person's arousal.

Underlining the great complexity of the area, Muhlbacher (1986) adds that the objective characteristics of such stimuli are perceived subjectively by the individual, so that any response is the result of interaction between stimuli, contexts, and existing personal predispositions.

Thus, even when it is limited to the context of advertising, involvement has been defined in different ways and associated with different objects. Further scope for confusion arises from research addressing its consequences from several partly overlapping theoretical frameworks. This chapter next considers involvement's influence on the order of stages in the persuasive process, and on the strategies and depth of information-processing.

2.1. Involvement and the sequence of persuasion

It was in the context of attitude change processes that consumer researchers first became interested in involvement. Krugman (1965) suggested that the traditional cognitive-affective-conative sequence of attitude change might not always hold, and that involvement may influence the order of persuasion:

> ...with low involvement one might look for gradual shifts in perceptual structure, aided by repetition, activated by behavioral (sic) choice situations, and **followed** at some time by attitude change. With high involvement one would look for the classic, more dramatic, and more familiar conflict of ideas at the level of conscious opinion and attitude that precedes changes in overt behavior (p 355).

Indeed, Ray (1973) noted that advertising studies did not always find the cognitive-affective-conative sequence of persuasion. Seeking explanations for this, he referred to Krugman's low involvement sequence, and to dissonance attribution theories suggesting a conative-affective-cognitive sequence. Ray therefore offered a "three-orders model", suggesting that the sequence of persuasion depended in part on consumer involvement with a communication or topic. He conducted an extensive research programme with various colleagues, showing consumers ads in a setting resembling "natural" viewing conditions. He found that the low-involvement hierarchy best matched the results, in that recall and purchase intentions were significantly affected by repetition, while affect was not.

Rather than believing the sequence of persuasion to vary with involvement, other researchers have proposed integrated models, based on broader interpretations of cognition, affect, and conation. Thus, Smith and Swinyard (1982) argue that the traditional "learning" sequence may also be followed under low involvement conditions. In such cases, cognitions and affect may exist at weaker or lower-order levels, and conation may be in terms of trial rather than commitment. Park and Mittal (1985) also distinguish between trial and commitment, and discuss the role of affect in greater detail. They argue that involvement may be utilitarian (cognitive) or value-expressive (affective). Furthermore, the type as well as the level of involvement may influence its impact. Thus, cognitive involvement should lead to extensive analytical response, and be amenable to measurement using brand attribute-based cognitive responses. In contrast, affective involvement may result in analogical, imagery-matching processes. As Park and Mittal note, these processes have been described in the cognitive psychology literature as faster, more automatic, and autistic. Thus, the absence of extensive information-processing may indicate affective rather than low involvement. Finally, Park and Mittal refer to a third mode of attitude formation, associated with ephemeral affect. They suggest that this may be relevant to low involvement. In this case, brand attitudes may be formed by affective feelings, triggered by the ad and generated via episodic memory.

2.2. Two routes to persuasion: the Elaboration Likelihood Model

The Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) was developed in the field of social psychology (Petty and Cacioppo 1979, 1980) and subsequently applied to advertising (Petty et al 1983). The authors noted that two distinct routes to attitude change consistently emerged in the persuasion literature. One route, which they

described as **central processing**, was based on careful and diligent consideration of message arguments. They labelled the other route **peripheral processing**. Here, attitudes were formed or changed simply by associating an issue or product with cues such as the credibility or attractiveness of the message source. Chaiken (1980) describes this as "heuristic" rather than "systematic" processing.

The ELM views receivers of persuasive messages as "neither invariantly cognitive nor universally mindless" (Cacioppo and Petty 1985). Rather, the route taken by individuals in particular situations depends on their motivation and ability to process the message arguments. The personal relevance of the issue or product featured in the message to an individual was thought to be an important source of motivation. Ability to process the message was thought be determined by the message environment, medium and complexity, and by a consumers' level of knowledge and experience. If consumers are motivated and able to process an ad centrally, their resultant brand attitudes should be relatively strong and enduring, and better predictors of behaviour, than attitudes based on peripheral processing.

Support for the ELM was initially drawn from social psychology experiments. For example, Petty and Cacioppo (1980) presented students with a taped message advocating an extra examination. Several versions of the message were prepared, so that it used strong or weak arguments, and was presented by an expert or non-expert source. Involvement was manipulated by the examination being advocated for the following year (affecting the students personally), or in ten years time. As expected, the attitudes of "high involvement" students were influenced by the quality of message arguments, while less involved students were more persuaded by source expertise.

Applying the ELM to advertising, Petty and Cacioppo (1980) used quite a literal translation of their experimental manipulation: "high involvement" students were told that a new brand of shampoo was to be test marketed locally, and "low involvement" students were told that it would be marketed in Europe. While product involvement may be situational, this manipulation appears particularly weak: all brands in a supermarket are "available locally", yet that does not make them all highly involving to consumers.

Several versions of a shampoo ad were designed, manipulating the strength of the arguments (a central cue) and the attractiveness of the couple endorsing the brand (a peripheral cue). As predicted, the brand attitude of "low involvement" students was

influenced only by the couple's attractiveness. However, against expectations, the "highly involved" students were influenced by the couple's attractiveness as well as by the strength of the brand-related arguments. As Petty et al (1983:138) observe,

> In retrospect, in addition to serving as a peripheral cue under low involvement, the physical appearance of the product endorsers (especially their hair) may have served as persuasive visual testimony for the product's effectiveness.

From this, they noted that central cues were not necessarily verbal, nor were peripheral cues always visual. This is an important if somewhat obvious point to those with backgrounds in advertising rather than social psychology. However, rather than building on their hindsight, their next experiment simply used a peripheral cue which would not be considered a product-relevant argument. In this case, they found that their "high involvement" group was influenced only by the quality of arguments provided, while the "low involvement" group was influenced only by the celebrity status of the message source. Once again, the manipulation of involvement was weak, as it appeared to confuse the immediacy and importance of a choice:

> Subjects in the high-involvement group were told that they would be able to select from a variety of disposable razor products, rendering our bogus razor ad highly involving. (Petty et al 1983:18)

As Lee (1992) observes, a person can hardly be expected to be as involved in choosing a brand of razor as with a topic such as capital punishment. Nonetheless, the ELM has interested many advertising researchers. While different treatments of involvement preclude direct comparisons, several studies offer empirical support for the ELM, or at least provide findings compatible with its tenets. For example, Miniard et al (1991) found that under low involvement conditions, students' brand attitudes were influenced by "peripheral" pictures rather than product claims, while the reverse was true under high involvement conditions. Celsi and Olson (1988) found that as subjects' "felt involvement" increased, they spent more time looking at ads and more effort in comprehending them, focused more on product information, and made more inferences on the basis of that information. Further support is offered by Bowen and Chaffee (1974), Gardner et al (1978), Batra (1985), Kardes (1988), and Rose et al (1990).

Attitude to the ad (Aad) researchers have found some similarities between the ELM and their own concerns. Thus, consumers' brand-related cognitions may be the dominant influence on brand attitudes under high involvement conditions,

representing the central route to persuasion. Under low involvement conditions, Aad may be more influential, representing the peripheral route. The studies by Mitchell and Olson (1981), Lutz et al (1983), Moore and Hutchinson (1983) and MacKenzie and Lutz (1983) were conducted in conditions approximating to low involvement (Gardner 1985a), and their findings are consistent with the ELM. In a more direct test of the model, MacKenzie and Spreng (1992) found that greater involvement increased the impact of central information-processing on brand attitudes, and decreased the impact of "peripheral cues" as indicated by Aad.

2.3. Challenges to the Elaboration Likelihood Model

The ELM has been challenged on theoretical and empirical grounds. Baker and Lutz (1987) point out that it focuses on the ad exposure occasion, although information and involvement at the point of purchase may also influence brand attitudes and choice. Noting that ELM research focuses on attitude formation, Miniard et al (1988) question its relevance when consumers are already familiar with a brand.

Most challenges to the ELM, however, concern the central/peripheral dichotomies. Firstly, there are difficulties in classifying ad elements as "central" or "peripheral" cues. As Boller and Olson (1991) observe, the ELM implicitly assumes that ads have an argumentative form. Many ads, however, take the form of "dramas" rather than "lectures" (Wells 1989). Instead of presenting facts or product benefits for the audience to learn, "drama" ads deliver a taste or sample of a product's emotional rewards offering the audience vicarious experiences and the opportunity to empathise with an ad's characters and situations. In such cases, the central/peripheral distinction may not be straightforward or even meaningful. Problems have also been encountered in "lecture" ads. Thus, Hastak and Park (1990) found that the use of one- or two-sided messages did not interact with involvement as expected. It has also been suggested that "peripheral" cues may be processed centrally when no "central" cues are available (Bitner and Obermiller 1985; Obermiller 1985), or when a product offers sensory or pleasure benefits (Aaker et al 1992). Indeed, Cole et al (1990:235) argue that

> ...whether or not a given cue acts centrally, peripherally, as an irrelevant cue or as a dominant cue depends to a large extent on characteristics of the product, the individual, the situation and the ad.

In this context, Higie et al (1991) found that consumers who were highly involved with computers attended to all features of a computer ad. These consumers reported

more source-related cognitive responses, and were more influenced by endorser expertise than those who were less involved. The authors suggest that the response of highly involved consumers may reflect a concern with self-image and a desire to relate to the expert endorser.

Despite these indications that ad elements cannot be neatly broken down into central and peripheral elements, several studies have treated them in a very simplistic way. For example, Rose et al (1990:130) manipulated the visual attractiveness of soft drink ads on the basis of pretest findings:

> The favorably evaluated stimulus was a tropical beach scene with a rising sun. The disliked stimulus was a side view of five ugly iguanas facing the same direction.

People may indeed have different attitudes to these two pictures, but their presentation in isolation is not the same as presenting them within an ad (Williamson 1978). Indeed, it could be argued (and presumably is by advertising agencies) that a good ad contains no peripheral elements.

To some extent, Cacioppo and Petty (1989) have tried to broaden their model to incorporate such considerations. They argue that the ELM does not assume information assessment to be necessarily rational, nor affect to be always peripheral to the merits of a product or issue. Thus, determination of an object's central merits may entail analysis of feelings rather than beliefs, and the affective state generated by an ad may be a persuasive argument.

A second, related group of challenges to the ELM concerns the existence of two mutually exclusive routes to persuasion. Miniard et al (1988) and Lee (1992) suggest that central processing may be initiated by peripheral processing. Others have also viewed the two routes as intertwined, particularly under conditions of high involvement (Obermiller 1985; Laczniak and Carlson 1989). In Chapter Two, we have seen empirical support for the Dual Mediation Hypothesis (MacKenzie et al 1986), whereby Aad influences brand attitudes through brand cognitions as well as directly. Indeed, various studies have pointed to the importance of Aad under high involvement conditions. Muehling and Laczniak (1988), Muehling et al (1990), Chattopadhyay and Nedungadi (1990), and Yoon (1992) all found that Aad predicted brand attitudes of highly involved consumers. Gardner (1985a) and Phelps and Thorson (1991) report that Aad explained similar amounts of variance in brand attitudes under high and low involvement conditions.

Laczniak and Carlson (1989) suggest that the apparent impact of Aad under high involvement conditions may reflect a failure to distinguish between involvement and knowledge. Their research concerning responses to a camera ad found that involved but less knowledgeable consumers were influenced by Aad and brand beliefs. When consumers were both knowledgeable and involved, however, only Aad was influential. The authors suggest that when highly involved consumers are familiar with a product, the peripheral route may replace rather than supplement central processing of ads.

Extending the theoretical work of Park and Mittal (1985), Park and Young (1986) distinguish between cognitive and affective involvement. They found that under conditions of affective and low involvement, Aad had a significant influence on consumers' attitudes to a brand of shampoo. It was not significant under cognitive involvement, although when the television ad contained background music, Aad had some effect on brand attitudes. Music facilitated information-processing under low involvement conditions, but interfered in the cognitive involvement condition. Its impact was less clear under affective involvement. The music for the ad was chosen simply because of its popularity, as the authors argued that music is typically unrelated to attribute-based message contents. This ignores the possibility that it may be a meaningful sign in its own right, not least in juxtaposition with other ad elements (Williamson 1978; Scott 1990). Commenting on their findings, Park and Young suggest that the impact of a peripheral cue such as music may depend on its integration into the ad. This may indicate a less simplistic understanding of ad elements, although the notion of an "integrated peripheral cue" suggests limited enlightenment.

Various studies, then, have questioned the existence of two mutually exclusive routes to persuasion, and demonstrated that in some cases at least they are intertwined. Perhaps in response to such challenges, Cacioppo and Petty (1985:94) argue that the two routes represent "positions on a continuous dimension" rather than two mutually exclusive types of message processing. This may be a less simplistic view, but we might ask what remains of the model when the central/peripheral dichotomies are removed.

2.4. Involvement and depth of processing

Several researchers have preferred to discuss involvement's impact on advertising response in terms of the intensity or depth of information-processing. Burnkrant and Sawyer (1983) review some early research in this area, suggesting that highly involved consumers should process ads more intensively than others. According to Baker and Lutz (1987), the depth of processing at exposure to advertising is influenced by several factors, such as message design, the opportunity and ability to process the message, and advertising message involvement. They define such involvement as

> ...a motivational construct embodying the amount of cognitive effort directed by the consumer at processing the contents of an advertising message (p 75).

Once again, the nature of involvement appears to be explained in terms of its consequences: presumably the effort exerted by consumers is a result of, rather than synonymous with, involvement. Baker and Lutz discuss other consequences of advertising message involvement, arguing that it determines the perceived relevance of different information: as involvement increases, the relevance of lower levels of information decreases and makes them less accessible from memory. Thus, at very low levels of involvement, processing is limited to recognition of advertising stimuli and brand response schemata are haphazard if activated. Under low levels of involvement, consumers attempt to comprehend and relate ad information to the brand (rather than product class) memory network. Finally, under high levels of involvement, brand attribute information is processed and compared with existing knowledge about other brands within the product category.

In an impressive synthesis of the information-processing literature, MacInnis and Jaworski (1989) identify six levels of processing. They argue that the level depends on a consumer's ability, opportunity and motivation to process an ad. They explicitly avoid the term "involvement", but suggest that motivation is based on utilitarian or value-expressive needs for a product. Such needs may be considered in terms of product involvement.

Feature analysis is the lowest level of processing discussed by MacInnis and Jaworski. In this case, consumers simply recognise salient ad cues, reacting to them automatically and emotionally. At the second level, **basic categorisation** takes

place. Here, recognition of the ad and salient cues occurs. While consumers respond to and evaluate those elements, they are unlikely to integrate them with brand information, so that brand attitudes may be formed through affect transfer. At these two lower levels, reported brand and ad attitudes should be highly correlated, and based on response to salient ad features and the viewing environment. The third level is **meaning analysis**, whereby relatively superficial brand processing occurs, and heuristic cues such as source credibility may be used to make brand inferences. Here, Aad should mediate brand attitudes, especially when processing is driven by expressive rather than utilitarian product needs.

Information integration takes place at the fourth level. Consumers engage in analysis of specific message-relevant cues. They integrate these with other information in working memory, and form inferential brand beliefs. The quality of brand information is an important determinant of ad and brand attitudes. At the fifth level, **role-taking** occurs, and consumers relate brand information to themselves. Indeed, as Shavitt and Brock (1986) argue, incorporation of the self in cognitive responses implies some elaboration of the message, and such thoughts should be more persuasive. MacInnis and Jaworski consider consumers to be role-taking when they place themselves vicariously in the ad or product experience. This may allow them to simulate trial of a product, so that the potential consequences of using or not using it become clearer. Such a process is essentially analogical rather than analytical, and requires empathetic identification with an ad's characters, situations or problems. Ad cues may facilitate such empathy, which will in turn influence brand beliefs and attitudes. Finally, at the highest level, constructive processing or **self-generated persuasion** takes place. Here, consumers embellish the brand information presented by mentally constructing product attributes, benefits or uses beyond those suggested in the ad. These constructions may be semantic or imagery-based. Imagery-based constructions are likely to evoke emotional responses. In either case, however, the act of self-generated thinking is likely to generate relatively strong brand beliefs and attitudes, which are more independent of the message content. Ad attitudes are unlikely to be salient, as consumers' attention is focused internally rather than externally towards the ad.

MacInnis and Jaworski argue that their approach is more detailed and comprehensive than the ELM's "collapsed" treatment of attitude formation. For example, while the ELM is restricted to the basic categorisation, meaning analysis and information integration levels, their work addresses processing at lower and

higher levels. Furthermore, while the ELM is vague about the nature of peripheral processing, they distinguish between affective and inferential mechanisms. Thus, it appears relevant to "drama" as well as "lecture" ads.

2.5. Involvement and advertising response: an assessment

Overall, there is little empirical support for any one model of involvement's impact on consumers' response to ads: once again, researchers' attempts to predict such responses have been confounded by the complexity of ads and their interaction with consumers, even within the limited confines of experimental settings. Thus, models have been modified or qualified, as the expected results fail to materialise and explanations are sought for the discrepancy. As Cole et al (1990) observe, if a model is to be useful, it should be robust enough to handle minor procedural variations. On that criterion, the ELM, which has received the most attention, is clearly problematic. Furthermore, in recognising the problems of distinguishing between central and peripheral cues or processing, the ELM's originators have undermined its parsimonious appeal.

More generally, there are some fundamental problems with research on involvement and advertising. Table 3.1. presents methodological details from 35 studies. As it indicates, involvement has been interpreted in different ways. In some case it is presented as enduring, and in others as situational. Its object has variously been defined as products, brand choice, ad "message", and brand-related information processing. These last two categories pose particular problems. They usually describe attention given to overt brand attribute information, as a consequence of brand choice or product involvement (Celsi and Olson 1988).

There are also many problems with operationalisations of the involvement construct. As Table 3.1. indicates, 23 studies manipulated rather than measured involvement. Petty and Cacioppo (1981) argue that using self-reports or allowing subjects to assign themselves to groups would confound involvement with other, possibly unobserved differences between groups. While this is a reasonable point, presumably they would accept that weak manipulations are hardly superior. Thus, manipulations range from the extremely crude (Kardes 1988) to the quite imaginative (Park and Young 1986). Some are hardly manipulations at all, as they explicitly instruct subjects to focus on particular aspects of the ad (Laczniak and Carlson 1989; Homer 1990; Yoon 1992). Laczniak et al (1989) are critical of many

involvement manipulations, and the failure of researchers to justify them or demonstrate the use of appropriate manipulation checks. Unfortunately, their own manipulation includes an instruction concerning the focus of attention, which again seems to define involvement in terms of its effects.

Several researchers have also questioned whether studies manipulating involvement have really addressed low involvement conditions. De Bruicker (1977) argued that research only addressed high and low levels of acute involvement. Similarly, Celsi and Olson (1988:216) refer to "baseline" rather than "low" involvement. They argue that every study contains cues which may lead to situational involvement, activating self-relevant goals such as "look good", "be clever", or "don't appear foolish".

In Chapter Two, concerns were raised about the ecological validity of Aad research. Unfortunately, these apply equally to research on involvement and advertising. For example, of the 35 studies presented in Table 3.1., only ten embedded the test ads in editorial material: 16 presented test ads in isolation, and the remainder embedded them only in other ads. Furthermore, 25 studies used simulated ads for fictitious brands. As Lee (1992) has pointed out, research supporting the ELM has used ads displaying little creative flair, so that "peripheral" cues may have been less likely to have been automatically processed than in the real world. The sheer number of arguments employed in some ads is also worrying. Miniard et al (1991) used seven claims in their ad for "Sunburst", their fictitious soft drink. The heavy reliance on fictitious brands obviously restricts the generalisability of research findings to the context of attitude formation rather than change. More fundamentally, Thorson's (1990) point about the need to conduct advertising research with real ads appears in need of making once again.

The procedures and measures used in this research stream may also be criticised. For example, Petty et al (1983:138-139) conducted their experiment among small groups in "a very large classroom":

> The subjects were isolated from each other so that they could complete the experiment independently...[and told] to continue through the booklet at their own pace and to raise their hands when finished.

Even Thorson does not appear to be as critical of artificial procedures as she is of artificial ads. Thus, Thorson and Page (1988:119) report that

> Subjects were instructed that their primary task would be to watch the commercial. At random intervals...a tone would sound and they were to press a response key as soon as possible.

Zinkhan and Fornell (1989) admit that most of their measures were suited to laboratory settings, and may be of little value in more naturalistic studies. Presumably the same could be said of the Gardner et al (1978) manipulation, which required some subjects to evaluate ads in terms of alliteration, onomatopoeia, rhyme, hyperbole, and the presence of the words "you" and "your"!

Of the 35 studies presented in Table 3.1., 24 used full-time student samples, and a further four used part-time students or some full-time students. In most cases, these students were drawn from marketing or communications courses, and earned course credit for participating. While Shimp et al (1991) have argued that demand artifacts in experimental research are less common or significant than many critics believe, this heavy reliance on student samples must give rise to some concern. Regardless of problems associated with guessing or compliance, students are, as we have seen in Chapter Two, a distinct and not necessarily representative group.

TABLE 3.1. STUDIES OF INVOLVEMENT AND ADVERTISING RESPONSE

Study	Student Sample?	Stimuli	Definition of Involvement	Operationalisation of Involvement
Ray (1973)	No	Numerous embedded ads for various product categories	Communication or topic involvement	**Measured**: Used various methods including Krugman's (1965) "connections" task
Wright (1973)	No	Embedded radio, print ad (s) for soybean product (f)	Content-processing involvement	**Manipulated**: HI group told they would make important purchase decision about product in ad
Bowen & Chaffee (1974)	Yes (P/T)	16 print ads projected on screen 8 product categories	Product involvement	**Measured:** Used perceived differences between brands in product category
Gardner et al (1978)	Some	Print ad (s) for car (f), pen (f), tyre (f) & shoes (f)	Brand evaluation processing	**Manipulated:** HI group told to examine ads as if planning to buy brand, to think aloud and make a brand evaluation LI group told to evaluate ads' ability to attract & hold attention, to think aloud and look at use of onomatopoeia, assonance, alliteration, rhyme, etc.
Petty & Cacioppo (1981)	Yes	Ad-embedded print ad (s) for shampoo (f)	Brand choice involvement	**Manipulated:** HI group told brand to be test-marketed locally LI group told brand to be marketed in Europe
Schumann (1983 in Cacioppo and Petty 1985)	Yes	Embedded TV ad (s) shown in slide & audio form, for pen (f)	Brand choice involvement	**Manipulated:** HI group told they could choose a ballpoint pen from various brands, including the one in ad
Batra (1985)	No	40 TV ads 10 product categories	Brand choice involvement	**Measured:** Used rating of importance attributed to buying a particular brand in a product category

Key: (s) - simulated (f) - fictitious HI/LI - high/low involvement

TABLE 3.1 CTD.

Study	Student Sample?	Stimuli	Definition of Involvement	Operationalisation of Involvement
Chebat & Picard (1985)	Yes	Print ad (s) for soap (f) & car (f)	Brand choice involvement	**Measured:** Used ratings of time and care which should be taken in making choice of brand
Cushing & Douglas-Tate (1985)	No	32 TV ads 16 product categories	People/product relationship	**Measured:** Used "buying style" scale incorporating brand loyalty, variety-seeking, information-seeking, etc.
Gardner (1985)	Yes	Ad-embedded print ad (s) for tennis ball (f) and cooking oil (f)	Brand evaluation set	**Manipulated:** HI group told to evaluate advertised brands LI group told to evaluate advertising style, as Gardner et al (1978)
Park & Young (1986)	No	TV ad (s) for shampoo (f)	Commercial involvement: cognitive or affective	**Manipulated:** HI (cognitive) group told shampoo brands different, that ad may contain some important information on a brand, to watch as if needing shampoo & trying to learn product benefits HI (affective) group told brands have own image, to imagine watching Casablanca, admiring Ingrid Bergman's hair, & to watch ad as if going to buy brand on emotional, self-image appeal **Manipulated:** LI group told brands all the same, to watch ad as if they had six months stock of shampoo & had just heard close friend very ill
Zinkhan & Muderr isoglu (1986)	Yes (P/T)	Embedded radio ad(s) for car (f), stereo (f)	Product involvement	**Measured:** Used ratings of product interest, personal importance & ability to make connections between product and own life experiences; Buchanan's scale of relative involvement; Krugman's (1965) "connections"

Key: (s) - simulated (f) - fictitious HI/LI - high/low involvement

TABLE 3.1 CTD.

Study	Student Sample?	Stimuli	Definition of Involvement	Operationalisation of Involvement
Celsi & Olson (1988)	Some	Print ads for tennis shoes, racquets, and strings	Felt involvement: situational, intrinsic	**Manipulated & measured:** HI (situational) group told they may win choice of racquet, shoes, or string brand Baseline (situational) group told to read ads as if at home Used Zaichkowsky's (1985) scale to measure intrinsic involvement
Kardes (1988)	Yes	Ad-embedded print ad (s) for CD player (f)	Product involvement	**Manipulated:** HI group: ad headline ran "You will probably own a CD player sooner than you think. Some CD players are very bad and some are very good". LI group: ad headline ran "CD Players".
Muehling & Laczniak (1988)	Yes	Embedded print ad (s) for personal stereo (f)	Message involvement, product involvement	**Measured:** Used number of message-related cognitive responses; ratings of attention etc. to ad's written message, and of ad's relevance to needs; Lastovicka & Gardner's involvement scale
Thorson & Page (1988)	Yes	12 TV ads for 12 products	Product involvement	**Measured:** Used Zaichowsky's (1985) scale
Hastak & Olson (1989)	Yes	Print ad (s) for bread (f) & ballpoint pen (f)	Brand processing set	**Manipulated:** HI group told study was of how people evaluate products based on ad information; told to examine ad, decide if they liked the brand and wished to buy it LI group told study was of how people evaluate print ads; told to examine ad's ability to attract attention & decide if they liked it

Key: (s) - simulated (f) - fictitious HI/LI - high/low involvement

TABLE 3.1 CTD.

Study	Student Sample?	Stimuli	Definition of Involvement	Operationalisation of Involvement
Laczniak & Carlson (1989)	No	Embedded print ad (s) for 35 mm camera (f)	Message involvement	**Manipulated:** HI group told publisher interested in their reaction to ads, & to pay close attention to ad claims in order to evaluate the brand
Zinkhan & Fornell (1989)	No	Embedded print ad (s) for car (f) & ice-cream (f)	Product involvement	**Measured/manipulated:** Used Buchanan's relative involvement scale; if car not more involving than ice-cream subject excluded
Chatto-padhyay & Nedungadi (1990/2)	Yes	Embedded TV ad (s) for ballpoint pen (f)	Message processing involvement	**Manipulated:** HI group told study was to examine ad evaluation, & to attend carefully to ad as they could earn up to $5 by answering questions about the ad
Cole et al (1990) Study 1:	Yes	Ad-embedded print ad (s) for 35 mm camera (f), disposable razor	Situation involvement, product involvement	**Manipulated/assumed:** HI (sit) group told they could choose razor brand or enter draw for choice of camera brand HI (prod) assumed for camera, LI for razor
Cole et al (ctd.) Study 2:	Yes	Ad-embedded print ad (s) for razor (f)	Situation involvement	**Manipulated**: As Petty et al (1983)
Study 3:	Yes	Ad-embedded "billboard" ad (s) for soft drink (s) & MBA programme	Product involvement, situation involvement	**Assumed/manipulated:** HI assumed for MBA programme, increased by draw for free MBA guidebook LI assumed for soft drink
Hastak & Park (1990)	Yes	Ad-embedded print ad (s) for ballpoint pen (f)	Brand choice involvement	**Manipulated:** HI group told they could choose a ballpoint pen, that pen in ad was soon to be marketed locally LI group told they could choose pain reliever, that pen in ad would be marketed elsewhere Control group told no story

Key: (s) - simulated (f) - fictitious HI/LI - high/low involvement

TABLE 3.1 CTD.

Study	Student Sample?	Stimuli	Definition of Involvement	Operationalisation of Involvement
Hennessy & Anderson (1990)	Yes	Printed announcement (s) for writing course (f)		**Assumed**: HI if still to meet university writing proficiency requirement
Homer (1990) Study 1:	Yes	Embedded TV ad for unfamiliar shampoo	Brand evaluation set; product knowledge, importance	**Manipulated & measured**: HI (brand) group told they would make a purchase decision for one of the brands in ad, and to focus on product information LI (brand) group told to evaluate casting in TV programme and ads Used ratings of product knowledge, importance
Study 2:	Yes	Ad-embedded print ad for telephone service	As Study 1	As Study 1
Muehling et al (1990)	Yes	Embedded print ad (s) for personal stereo(f)	Message involvement	**Measured:** measured focus of attention, perceived message relevance; also counted claim-related cognitive responses
Rose et al (1990)	Yes	Print ad (s) for soft drink (f)	Processing involvement	**Manipulated:** HI group told they would see ads for soft drinks and could choose six-pack of preferred brand
Higie et al (1991)	Yes	Print ad (s) for personal computer (f)	Enduring involvement, task involvement	**Manipulated & measured:** HI (task) group told to imagine they intended to buy/upgrade a PC, that a friend had just asked their advice on PCs, & to make purchasing decision Used Higie & Feick (1989) enduring involvement scale

Key: (s) - simulated (f) - fictitious HI/LI - high/low involvement

TABLE 3.1 CTD.

Study	Student Sample?	Stimuli	Definition of Involvement	Operationalisation of Involvement
Miniard et al (1991) Study 1:*	Yes	Print ad (s) for soft drink (f)	Personal relevance of ad	**Manipulated:**HI group told they could choose soft drink, as Rose et al (1990)
Study 2:	Yes	Print ad (s) for soft drink (f)	As above	**Manipulated:** HI group as above LI group simply told to evaluate each ad
Phelps & Thorson (1991)	Yes	21 TV ads 8 product categories	Product involvement	**Measured:** Used Zaichkowsky's (1985) PII scale
MacKenzie & Spreng (1992)	Yes	Print ad (s) for watch (f)	Motivation to process brand or ad	**Manipulated:** HI (brand, ad) group told to form evaluation of brand and ad LI (brand), HI (ad) group told to evaluate ad, not brand
Yoon (1992)	Yes	TV ad for tyre	Message processing involvement	**Manipulated:** HI group told tyre brands different, that ad may have brand information, & to watch ad as if needing tyres & trying to learn brand benefits: to focus on product information LI group told tyre brands the same, & to watch ad as if had just bought tyres, worrying about a class project

Key: (s) - simulated (f) - fictitious HI/LI - high/low involvement

* as this appears to report on the Rose et al (1990) study, it has not been counted as a separate study. However, the interpretation of involvement is slightly different between the two accounts.

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3. ADVERTISING INVOLVEMENT

As we have seen, many studies address the effects of product, brand, task or situational involvement on advertising response. Several studies refer to the advertising message as the object of involvement. In practice, however, they seem to address the consequences of brand or product involvement for the way an ad's overt

product-attribute information is considered. For example, Andrews (1988) and Andrews and Durvasula (1991) developed measures which they propose as useful checks on the manipulation of involvement with advertising message content. These require respondents to rate their level of agreement with statements about the extent to which they attended to, concentrated on, thought about, focused on, exerted effort looking at,and carefully read an ad's brand-related content.

Although the very notion of consumer involvement was introduced in the context of consumers' response to advertising (Krugman 1965), relatively little consideration has actually been given to understanding the nature or implications of consumers' involvement with ads per se. As Krugman's work has had such a profound influence in this area, it is important to understand what he meant by involvement and its implications. The next section therefore examines his contribution.

3.1. Krugman's theory of advertising involvement

According to Krugman (1965:355), by the term "personal involvement",

> ...we do **not** mean attention, interest or excitement but the number of conscious "bridging experiences", connections, or personal references per minute that the viewer makes between his own life and the stimulus.

Several points arise from this conceptualisation. Firstly, Krugman explicitly rejects definitions of involvement as "attention, interest or excitement". His view of involvement is response-based, and in Cohen's (1983) terms, appears to define the concept in terms of its consequences. Secondly, Krugman's references to "bridging experiences", "connections" and "personal references" could accommodate a wide range of rich and idiosyncratic responses to advertising, both cognitive and affective. However the potential richness is undermined by his insistence that it is the number of these connections per minute which determines the level of involvement. Thus, he emphasises the **quantity** rather than the **quality** or strength of connections. Intuitively, however, we might expect an advertisement which "connected" with a fundamental event or value in our lives to be more involving than one with which we made a number of trivial connections. The furore in Britain over the Benetton poster depicting a baby just after the moment of birth (Advertising Standards Authority 1991) would seem to support this. Indeed, as we have seen, involvement is frequently defined in terms of the linkages between an object and an individual's central value system (Rajaniemi and Laaksonen 1986). Thus, a simple count of the number of connections seems inappropriate.

Furthermore, we might expect "connections" to vary not just in strength, but also in dimensionality: again, reducing such variety to a single score appears crude and counter-productive. In this context, it is worth remembering Laurent and Kapferer's (1985) argument that the consequences of involvement depended on its dimensionality as well as its level.

Finally, it is interesting to note that Krugman believed an audience's response to commercial subject matter in the mass media to be generally characterised by a lack of personal involvement. Thus, his first paper in this area seems to undermine rather than promote the notion of advertising involvement. In a second paper, however, Krugman (1966-67) suggested that the level of involvement might depend on the media class employed. He argued that low involvement should prevail with television advertising, as the stimulus is animate in this case, whereas the observer is inanimate and unable to control the pace of the experience or dwell on message points. Thus, he saw little scope for the viewers to make connections with the content of television ads. In the case of magazines, however, Krugman argued that the stimulus is inanimate and the observer can control the pace of the experience, providing greater opportunity for making connections.

Krugman (1966-67) conducted a small-scale experiment with female subjects to test his hypotheses. He used television and magazines as the media, and airline and margarine brands to manipulate product expensiveness (although this could also be seen as manipulating perceived risk). He found that the average number of connections was indeed greater for magazine than for television advertising, and for the more expensive product. Comparing these results with those from a subsequent study involving male and female subjects, he suggested that magazines might be more involving than television only for "high-involvement" products. He also observed that men made fewer and less favourable connections than women.

These findings are certainly interesting. However, it should be remembered that Krugman was interested in the quantity of connections, not their importance to the individual. Presumably more time would be spent dwelling on an important connection, which may in turn prevent other connections from surfacing. Indeed, De Bruicker (1977) has suggested that under "intense" advertising involvement, people may well make fewer, but more intense connections. Krugman's approach would effectively reduce an individual's reported involvement level in that case. Furthermore, an indication of an "involving" ad might be that people continued to think about it and make connections with it beyond the time of exposure. For

example, Preston (1970) suggests that ads using demonstrations may be more likely to elicit connections when they are over. Krugman, however, dismissed any connections occurring after exposure as irrelevant.

It is also worth noting that Krugman's view of the television medium is in marked contrast to that of McLuhan (1964 : 36), who distinguished between "hot" and "cool" media:

> Hot media are...low in participation, and cool media are high in participation or completion by the audience.

McLuhan considered television a "cool" medium, requiring viewers to "fill in" gaps in information. Indeed, he even refers to television as demanding viewer "involvement" - a particularly interesting use of language from our perspective! More recently, the notion of the passive television audience has been refuted (eg Morley 1980; Lull 1980, 1990; Hobson 1982; Buckingham 1987; Jenkins 1992). Television seems to offer, and viewers appear to take, many opportunities for making "connections" between the content of various programmes and the content of viewers' own lives.

Preston (1970) intuitively agreed with Krugman's view of television advertising as less involving than that in magazines. However, he suggested that this may reflect differences in content rather than form between the two media classes. He argued that it was lack of "brand differentiation", rather than inherent media characteristics, which created low involvement with television advertising. His content analysis of 916 television and 1612 magazine ads revealed that magazines had more ads for "differentiated brands" than television, although many magazine ads were also for undifferentiated brands. In general, however, he did not consider advertising to operate at a high level of involvement, because it rarely incorporated "real" product discrimination.

Preston's view of brand differentiation, then, is a particularly narrow one. It only recognises physical or functional differences between products, and denies any role for branding (or advertising) in adding symbolic value to a product. Thus, he criticises Krugman for allowing connections about the ad itself rather than just the advertised brand:

> If the brand is scarcely differentiable from a number of competing brands it will probably be most difficult for the consumer to produce "connections" with that particular brand. This would be the theoretic expectation under the low-involvement model, yet it might be obscured if the consumer were adept at producing "connections" relating to the general product category or to the ad itself (pp 295-293).

What Preston seems to be describing here, however, is a situation where advertising can add value to a brand, particularly when the ads are "transformational" (Puto and Wells 1984) or "dramas" (Wells 1989).

3.2. Other views of advertising involvement

A number of subsequent definitions of advertising involvement have been offered. For example, according to Shimp (1981:10)

> Involvement represents the amount of arousal or interest evoked by a particular advertisement. The amount of arousal or interest determines the degree of attention devoted to an advertisement and also influences the processing strategy.

Thus, for high involvement to take place, a consumer must be attentive to the ad message and employ a brand evaluation strategy. If either of these conditions is not met, low involvement results. This may be attention-limited, in which no aspect of the ad is attended to, or strategy-limited, in which high attention is paid to non-brand elements, but little to brand information. Similarly, Muehling et al (1990:99) define high advertising involvement as "a state of heightened arousal or interest in an advertising stimulus". Once again, only certain aspects of the stimulus are considered relevant, as involvement is measured in terms of attention, perceived relevance, or elaboration with respect to ad claims or message points.

Other researchers admit the possibility of involvement with executional aspects of advertising. Thus, Tyebjee (1979) explains involvement in terms of arousal, which may be physiological, cognitive, attitudinal, interest- or mood-related. He argues that advertising involvement is multidimensional. However, in elaborating on this he focuses on different objects rather than dimensions of involvement. Thus, he suggests that involvement with advertising may in fact be involvement with one or more of three aspects:

1. the product or service advertised
2. the sales proposition or key promise of the ad
3. the background copy, or situation/visual elements (including music and non-product

related dialogue)

Furthermore, these forms of involvement may interact with involvement with a product, an advertising medium, and a programme or editorial context.

In a paper with the promising title of "The Dimensions of Advertising Involvement", Mitchell (1981) reiterates his definition of involvement as an individual state variable. He then consider the consequences of involvement when its object is a persuasive stimulus. However, the conceptual section of his paper seems to address the advertising implications of product involvement. Thus, Mitchell considers a hypothetical ad for a new fuel-efficient car which is shown on a dock surrounded by sailboats. He suggests that consumers planning to buy such a car would devote full attention to the ad: they would activate a memory schema containing information about fuel-efficient cars in order to evaluate the information in the ad. Other people, more interested in sailing than fuel-efficient cars, may be attracted to the ad and pay attention to it, but activate a memory schema relating to sailboats rather than cars. In the absence of involvement with the advertised product, then, consumers may become involved with a non-brand-related element of an ad.

Mitchell presents involvement with such ad elements as a default option, occurring only among those who are not highly involved with the advertised product or brand. Perhaps he assumes that highly product-involved consumers are so busy processing overt brand arguments that they have no time to consider other ad elements. This is a very questionable view, however. As we have seen, various studies found highly involved subjects to be interested in and influenced by "non-brand" elements. Furthermore, returning to Mitchell's example of the fuel-efficient car ad, if we assume it has been professionally developed, we would not expect the sailboats to be play a peripheral role in the ad. Rather, we would expect the juxtaposition of sailboats and car to be intended as a metaphorical device (Williamson 1978), and the target audience to make inferences about the car on that basis.

Once again, then, we see ads compartmentalised into "brand" and "non-brand" elements, and non-brand elements, or consumers' response to them, assigned a limited role. A similar theme is evident in other treatments of advertising involvement. As we have seen earlier, Baker and Lutz (1987) define advertising **message** involvement in terms of the effort devoted to processing an ad's "contents". They contrast it with advertising **execution** involvement,

> ...a motivational construct embodying the degree of cognitive effort directed by the consumer at processing the executional properties of an advertising stimulus without regard to their brand relatedness (p 80).

According to Baker and Lutz, involvement with an ad's execution detracts from message involvement, as it directs attention and effort away from the message and inhibits the accessibility of brand information from memory. Similarly, Muhlbacher (1986) describes an ad's "executional framework" as all parts of an ad except for the visualisation and reference to the product class or brand. He argues that

> The arousal of a person evoked by the individual parts of the executional framework of an advertisement and/or their interaction (gestalt) during advertising exposure may be called "advertisement involvement" (p 496).

Once again, this form of involvement is assigned a residual or default role. Thus, it is expected to occur when the arousal potential of a product class, brand purchase/consumption is low, and when other salient cues do not occupy a consumers' entire attention capacity. Furthermore, it is thought to entail less, more passive, and visually-dominated information-processing. Finally, in common with Baker and Lutz (1987), Muhlbacher considers this form of involvement detrimental to the processing of brand information.

Another perspective on advertising involvement is provided by Greenwald and Leavitt (1984:591). They refer to "audience involvement", defining it as

> ...the allocation of attentional capacity to a message source, as needed to analyse the message at one of a series of increasingly abstract representational level.

This view of involvement is similar to the Baker and Lutz framework, although it does not define the levels in terms of brand or product category schemata. Greenwald and Leavitt discuss four levels of processing: preattention, focal attention, comprehension and elaboration. Lower levels use little attentional capacity. As an audience moves up to higher levels, greater capacity is required in order to analyse a message in an increasingly abstract way. Elaboration is the highest level of processing, and goes beyond simply absorbing information in an ad: consumers might relate the message to personal goals, imagine events related to the message, or actively support or disagree with some message arguments. Clearly, this view of high involvement can be linked to Krugman's "connections", and also to Wright's (1973) cognitive response categories: in Greenwald and Leavitt's terms, these are activities associated with high involvement. There are also similarities with the MacInnis and Jaworski model. In discussing their six levels of processing,

however, MacInnis and Jaworski at least makes it clear that the level is dependent on, rather than synonymous with, the level of motivation to process an ad.

Batra and Ray (1983) also define involvement in an advertising context in terms of the depth and quality of message-evoked cognitive responses. They contend that message response involvement is situational, coming about with the interaction of a particular person, a particular message and a particular point in time. A study of consumers' written protocols revealed that affective responses to ads, and thoughts which would be considered "irrelevant" in many cognitive response frameworks, were at least as common as those which were strictly cognitive. They suggest that given the richness and multidimensionality of responses which they obtained, commercials "scoring" highly on different dimensions may make competing, but plausible claims to being "involving". This is supported by the later work of Laurent and Kapferer (1985), which suggested that involvement should be measured by a profile rather than a single score, in order to reflect its dimensionality. While Laurent and Kapferer (1985) focus on the antecedents of involvement, Batra and Ray (1983) claim to be concerned with the state of involvement, although they seem to have defined this in terms of its consequences.

Two other perspectives on advertising involvement offer some useful insights. March and Swinbourne (1974) argue that there are two aspects to most ads - a relevant product message and other things - and that people could be interested in either of these. Their study of Australian housewives found that "interest in product message" and "interest in other things" were consistent, if weak, predictors of one another. They concluded that the two aspects should not be considered in isolation, as they may have some synergistic value for one another.

Reaction Profile research also offers a holistic perspective on involvement. As we have seen in Chapter Two, several factor analyses yielded involvement-related dimensions, which were not necessarily limited to brand considerations. For example, Moldovan's (1985) Reaction Profile included a dimension described as "empathy/self involvement". The items loading most strongly onto this factor were as follows:

> I get a kick out of it
>
> I would enjoy seeing it again
>
> It was personal and intimate

I feel I have experienced the same thing

It captured my attention

It appealed to people like myself

Clearly, these items do not imply a separation between the brand and non-brand content of an ad, but indicate rather how the two may interact.

4. CONCLUSIONS

Involvement appears to be relevant to consumers' experience of advertising in two ways. Firstly, involvement with products, brands or brand choice decisions may influence the way in which consumers process or experience ads. Secondly, ads themselves may be the object of involvement. However, the treatment of such issues in the advertising literature is flawed, and research appears to have promised more than it has delivered.

Thus, after nearly thirty years of attention from consumer researchers, involvement is still plagued by confusion. It emerges as an elusive construct, mutating to fit different objects. Even when the object of involvement is held constant, there is little consensus about its nature, antecedents and consequences. Despite the complexity indicated by such confusion, involvement research has focused on measurement and hypothesis-testing, rather than exploration and understanding. Indeed, her review of empirical involvement research led Zaichkowsky (1986) to suggest that in-depth interviews might be an "interesting approach" in this area. However, only Kapferer and Laurent (1985, 1986) appear to have made extensive use of interviews with consumers and/or practitioners.

These problems have been replicated or confounded when involvement theory has been applied to advertising. Similar to the Aad research reviewed earlier, studies of involvement and advertising response have been conducted mainly in an American context. They have been largely experimental, based on different interpretations of the key construct, and have relied heavily on student subjects, artificial ads and hypothetical brands. They have frequently taken a very compartmentalised view of ad content, attempting for example to reduce it to "central" and "peripheral" cues.

Even within this restricted area of involvement's domain, there has been little

agreement over the object of involvement, and much confusion between its nature, antecedents and consequences. In particular, there has been a tendency to focus on advertising message or brand processing involvement, which simply refer to increased attention to, or processing of, overt brand arguments in cases of high brand choice involvement. Such restrictive approaches persist in studies purporting to address advertising involvement itself. Thus, involvement with anything apart from overt brand arguments is considered at best irrelevant, or at worst detrimental to brand evaluation.

Park and Mittal (1985), Park and Young (1986), and MacInnis and Jaworski (1989) broaden this perspective slightly. They admit the possibility that consumers' motivation to process ads may be driven by self-expressive product needs as well as by those concerned with a brand's "functional" performance. However, this still presents a very utilitarian view of consumers' relationships with ads. In Millar and Tesser's (1990) terms, it limits such relationships to the field of instrumental rather than consummatory behaviour: consumers attend to or process ads only because they contain information which may help them meet product needs, be these functional or self-expressive.

This utilitarian view is hardly surprising, given the managerial focus of research on consumer involvement. It is unlikely to concern itself with consumer behaviour engaged in for its own sake rather than en route to forming brand attitudes or buying intentions. However, as Holbrook and Hirschman (1982) have pointed out, hedonic consumption is an important aspect of consumer behaviour. Advertising, with its great potential for vivid imagery and appeals to emotions, fun and fantasies, would appear to be a crucial site for such consummatory behaviour. Furthermore, such behaviour may have managerial implications, as it may interact with instrumental brand-related behaviour. Thus, even from a managerial perspective, the concept of advertising involvement deserves some further attention.

CHAPTER FOUR

ADVERTISING LITERACY AND ITS IMPLICATIONS

> ...language has had to be taken out of its glass case, dusted, and put back in a living environment...(Halliday 1978, in Graddol 1993b:15)

It seems that advertising may also benefit from being taken out of the glass case fashioned for it by research on attitudes and involvement. These research streams have largely bypassed consumers' lived experience of advertising, relying heavily on experimental settings and procedures, student subjects, simulated ads and fictitious products. They have also focused on advertising "lectures" rather than "dramas", reducing ads to overt product arguments and "peripheral" cues.

This chapter considers alternative perspectives on advertising, audiences and consumers' response to ads. It first addresses the view expressed by some British advertising practitioners that consumers are "advertising literate", and examines evidence for this proposition. Theories of language and literacy are then outlined, in order to develop a framework for considering advertising literacy and its implications. This leads to an examination of mass communications theory on media uses and gratifications, and cultural studies theory on the decoding of mass media messages. Finally, the chapter's underlying themes are drawn together and their implications for consumers' experience of advertising are considered.

1. ADVERTISING LITERACY: A (BRITISH) PRACTITIONER PERSPECTIVE

Several British advertising practitioners have discussed the sophistication of consumers' response to advertising. Meadows (1983) described consumers in general as "advertising literate", understanding the vocabulary, elements and styles of advertising. His term and sentiments captured the imagination of other practitioners including Drake (1984) and Iddiols (1989). Similarly, Lannon (1985) claimed that consumers could decode complex visual imagery and make inferences from minimal cues, perhaps because of continued exposure to high quality television programming.

Her paper has been widely cited and influential in ways beyond her intentions: Lannon (1993:21) remarks that she

> ...stood back horrified to see how various agencies took it right over the top - inventing the consumer as art critic, the semiotically sophisticated consumer who took PhD courses in decoding advertising.

The term "advertising literacy" is also used by Goodyear (1991) to describe consumers' sophistication with respect to advertising. She suggests that a country's level of advertising literacy is influenced by four factors. The first two - exposure to television and film, and to advertising itself - concern opportunities for learning conventions used in advertising. The third factor, the level of industrialisation and consumerisation, refers to the importance placed on added value through brand imagery: the more important this is, the greater the potential for advertising sophistication. Finally, national cultural factors favouring advertising literacy include an emphasis on trading consumer goods. Goodyear then purports to describe five levels of advertising literacy. Unfortunately, she does not define the term "literacy" beyond various references to sophistication, and the levels are expressed in terms of typical advertising styles rather than audience characteristics. Thus, the "immature" level emphasises the manufacturer's description of the product, while the "most sophisticated level" focuses on the advertising itself rather than the brand. In contrast, Lannon's (1992) continuum of advertising styles (Table 4.1) explicitly relates the styles to assumptions about the way in which consumers respond to ads. It represents the evolution of advertising as consumers have become more visually literate and adept at decoding, and as the complicity required of the viewer has increased.

Practitioners' views are interesting because they are based on experience with many diverse, proprietary, and often confidential projects. This may lead to insight and understanding with respect to particular customer groups, product types or advertising styles. However, practitioner understanding is likely to be fragmented. Research tends to be conducted to aid short-term decisions, and concerns about confidentiality may restrict the handling of competing accounts. Finally, severe time-pressures leave little opportunity for reflection or exploration of issues which are not of direct relevance to a project (Gordon 1982; Robson and Foster 1989). Thus, so far we have some tantalising insights into an intuitively appealing but loosely defined concept, based on research which is usually confidential. This chapter next examines the limited empirical research on advertising literacy which has entered the public domain.

TABLE 4.1. LANNON'S ADVERTISING STYLE CONTINUUM

1. The manufacturer speaks

   ...similar to having a "salesman in the living room". Assumes the receiver believes the manufacturer knows best and tells the truth.

2. The target group consumes with pleasure

   ...assumes the viewer will identify literally or aspirationally with the people in an ad, which adds value to product.

3. Hyperbole and exaggeration

   ...flatters viewers by assuming they understand hyperbole as an advertising convention; thus they can enjoy the fantasy and appreciate their own intelligence in recognising it as fantasy.

4. Brand adapts symbols and metaphors to express its character

   ...commercials for established brands with an evolved and complex language code, flattering viewers by recognising their complicity

5. Brand invents its own language

   ...most extreme form of flattery and assumed knowledge, as the advertiser essentially says "you now know me well so I do not have to explain myself. I can concentrate on stretching and engaging your imagination". The complicity and involvement are total.

Source: Adapted from J. Lannon (1992), "Asking the right questions - what do people do with advertising?", Admap, pp 15-16

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2. ADVERTISING LITERACY: EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE

Even within the confines of academic research on attitudes and involvement, there are some indications of experimental subjects' ability to make inferences from various ad cues. For example, Mitchell and Olson's (1981) subjects appeared to make inferences about the softness of facial tissues from the presence of a kitten in an ad. The authors note that

> ...consumers seem able to convert visual information into semantic knowledge or beliefs about attributes of the advertised brand. The process seems to occur even for visual stimuli that are seemingly irrelevant to the product (p 330).

Similarly, Petty et al (1983) found that their subjects seemed to treat the attractiveness of endorsers in a shampoo ad as "persuasive visual testimony" to the product's effectiveness. More recently, Kirmani and Wright (1989) report that experimental subjects used cost-related cues to make inferences concerning manufacturer confidence or product quality.

Several British studies illustrate the degree of decoding sophistication which may be expected from consumers. Wendy Gordon's company, The Research Business, undertook three studies in this area, all written for a practitioner audience. The first two were conducted independently, and the third was commissioned by the Leo Burnett agency.

Turning to the first study, Gordon (1982) reports on seven group discussions conducted among women aged 18-55, living in London and the South-east of England. In general, the women expected advertising to earn their attention and entertain them. They judged individual ads in the context of all advertising, and were not only interested in ads for products aimed at them. Respondents thought that advertising was becoming more complex and sophisticated, and that it "worked" by providing product information, differentiating between brands, and maintaining interest in them. There was also a sense that it had become more devious, playing on emotions, inducing guilt and materialistic aspirations.

In terms of advertising styles, testimonial approaches were considered unsubtle, sometimes patronising, and lacking in credibility or entertainment value. Respondents seemed to use a set of ground rules to interpret advertising endorsements. "Members of the public" were assumed to have been paid, and if their comments came from a genuine interview, it was assumed that the interview was edited. Moderately successful "personalities" were suspected to be out of work and endorsing a brand because they needed the money. Other "personalities" were criticised for endorsing too many products. In general, where "personalities" were used, a strong link between their identity and the brand was required. A final distinction was made between "personalities" endorsing a brand in their own name and acting out a part; as they were assumed to be acting anyway, the second route was thought to circumvent the problem of credibility. Gordon's respondents also displayed clear ideas about the "ground rules" of sex-role portrayals. They expected men's roles to be more varied than those for women, and men to be shown in positions of authority or superiority. Indeed, when traditional gender roles were reversed, ads were considered a "send-up", and not to be taken seriously.

There appeared to be a marked difference in the response of women aged 18-24 and those who were over 35. Younger women seemed to accept advertising as part of life, as a sort of "art form", which they readily admitted to enjoying; indeed, they seemed to equate good ads with good quality brands. They particularly liked clever, entertaining ads which treated them as intelligent and required some input from

them. They were confident of their own discernment, and felt less vulnerable to manipulation by advertising. They demonstrated a sophisticated understanding of how advertising worked on them, recognising its use of emotions, aspirations and even irritation. They were also aware of a range of advertising styles, mentioning categories such as "nostalgia", "comparisons", "pop/video", "futuristic", "follow-up", "sexy ladies", "humour", "cartoons", "jingles", and "symbols linking to the brand". Older women tended to regard ads more suspiciously, demonstrating a more simplistic, literal understanding of advertising and its objectives. They described advertising styles largely in terms of product types or ad settings, such as "housewife in the home". They did however mention other categories such as "story", "40's trend", and "modern" "aggressive" or "nightmarish". Thus, Gordon suggests that consumers' age may shape their response to advertising. However, her paper does not disclose the composition of the groups. If women in their thirties were placed in groups with others in their fifties, this may have inhibited differences in their approach to advertising from emerging.

A subsequent study was undertaken to enhance understanding of the "sophisticated consumer of advertising" (Gordon 1984). Methodological details are not available for the qualitative phase of the research, although it appears that once again only women took part. In the second, quantitative phase of the study, attitude statements were administered to "225 mainstream consumers", and subjected to factor and cluster analysis. Again, little methodological information is provided, but respondents appear to have been female, from social classes A to E and ranging in age from 16 to over 55. The results indicated that their orientations towards advertising differed on three salient dimensions:

1. degree of **trust** in advertisers, particularly in terms of the means used to achieve their ends
2. degree of **critical appreciation** of advertising's executional elements
3. degree to which advertising was considered to provide **rewards**

In developing a typology of consumer orientations, however, Gordon (1984) refers to only two dimensions. Thus, "critical appreciation" and "rewards" seem to have been collapsed into one dimension labelled "appreciation". "Trust" appears to have metamorphosised into "understanding" of advertising's role. The polar opposites describing this dimension are particularly partisan: consumers "understand" its role, or are "defensive" about it. The two dimensions yielded four consumer groups as follows:

Understanding appreciators accounted for 21% of the sample. Their orientation was thought to be best reflected by the statement "advertising rewards". They enjoyed clever and technically sophisticated advertising, but did not go quite so far as believing advertising to be an art form. They generally agreed that advertising is "devious" and motivates through aspiration and guilt, but they expressed little condemnation of this. They were particularly likely to watch commercial television, and were the heaviest newspaper readers. Finally, these respondents tended to be younger and biased towards the C1 social class and away from AB groups.

Unsophisticated appreciators accounted for 28% of the sample. The statement thought to best reflect their view was "the ads are better than the programmes". They strongly agreed with the idea of advertising as an art form, and rejected the idea that advertisers are devious or use emotions to motivate their audience. This group tended to be aged over 35, and was particularly well-represented among those aged 45-54.

Defensive unappreciators represented 23% of those interviewed. Their view was thought to be epitomised in the statement that "advertising is trash". They rejected all notions of advertising as an art form, and appeared unwilling to spend time considering the ways in which it might work. They were the lightest viewers and newspaper readers in the sample. Respondents aged over 55, and those in the AB social classes were particularly likely to fall into this group.

Suspicious unappreciators were the final group and accounted for 28% of the sample. Their orientation was summarised as "the end doesn't justify the means". They believed advertisers to be devious and motivating through guilt and aspiration. They did not consider advertising an art form, and were most likely to believe its only role to be informing the public about new goods and services. This group consisted of the heaviest watchers of television, and was biased towards the social class E.

This last grouping is interesting, as it suggests that sophisticated consumers of advertising are not necessarily sympathetic to it. Given the relatively small sample and problems with the origins of the typology, relationships between advertising orientations and demographics must be considered with care. However, given the limited information available on this topic, they are still of interest. Younger consumers appear to have a sophisticated understanding of advertising. In contrast, those from the social classes A and B emerged as quite unsophisticated in their

approach, perhaps reflecting their lighter exposure to advertising, particularly on television. They are most likely to be consumers of 'high culture' (Willis 1990), and thus may not be prepared to take advertising seriously. Those in the social class E appear to have a critical understanding of advertising. While this classification has been eliminated from Reynold's (1990) Market Research Society guide to occupations, it typically refers to those "at the margins of society". If these respondents were unemployed, their negative orientation contrasts sharply with the Advertising Association's (1988, 1992) finding that the unemployed and those with work were similar in their approval of advertising. If unemployed people are heavy viewers of television, they would have many opportunities to learn about advertising conventions, and may also become disaffected with the promotion of goods they can ill afford by the use of appeals such as guilt or aspiration.

The third study conducted by Gordon's company addressed consumers' understanding of the aims and techniques of advertising. Its findings have been reported in the Financial Times (Rawsthorn 1990) and in two Market Research Society presentations (Setford 1990; Ryan 1990). During a three-week period in Autumn 1989, 50 British "mass market families" and 30 marketing professionals were asked to keep a diary recording their opinions of any television commercials which made an impression on them. Specifically, they were asked to record their general comments, remark on particular features of the commercial, rate its likeability, and identify the advertiser's intentions. This was described as having people "writing in their own words, in their own home, in their own way" (Setford 1990). However, the guidance provided makes the procedure less open than the cognitive response approach discussed in Chapter Two.

According to Setford (1990), the study found consumers to be "ad-fluent", possessing a "real depth of knowledge" and "sensitivity" regarding the advertising process. Consumers had little difficulty describing advertising objectives, and even used the same sort of language as the marketing professionals. For example, it was a consumer who referred to "awareness of a new brand featuring its odour-destroying capability". Consumers also showed an appreciation of technical aspects of advertising, using words like "sepia colouring" and "variety of camera angles".

While limited methodological details are available on these studies, the first was certainly restricted to London and the South-east of England, and there is no suggestion that the other two differed in this respect. Only the third study appears to have included men and women, but gender differences receive scant attention.

Several other studies, conducted in different parts of Britain, and in different contexts, offer further insights into advertising literacy, particularly among young people.

For example, various studies have examined children's perceptions of health-related messages. Working with the Scottish Health Education Group, Aitken et al (1985, 1988a, b) conducted group discussions and individual interviews with Glasgow schoolchildren regarding their perceptions of cigarette and alcohol ads. In general, they appeared to enjoy advertising, particularly on television, and had developed a considerable level of sophistication in interpreting it. Secondary school children also mentioned its ability to mislead and use of biased appeals. They tended to have a much more differentiated and less simplistic view of ads. Thus, while ten-year-olds' responses tended to be tied to what was literally shown in commercials, older children

> ...alluded to much more complex appeals and imagery, in much the same way that adults do.
> (Aitken et al 1988a:498)

There seemed to be little difference in the response of children from inner-city working-class areas and those from suburban middle-class areas. However, children from the working class areas tended to make more disparaging comments about features of "stylish" or "sophisticated" ads which they considered pretentious (Aitken et al 1985; 1988a). Some gender differences were also observed, in that boys seemed to prefer alcohol ads with modernistic and surreal imagery, while girls tended to prefer those with feminine imagery (Aitken et al 1988a, b).

Young's (1990) research explicitly addressed the development of children's advertising literacy. One study, partly funded by the Health Education Council, involved children aged between five and ten in the North-west of England. Young found that less than a third of the five- and six-year olds, but four out of every five children aged eight or over, seemed aware of the commercial function of ads. The children were also shown an ad for a biscuit called "Star Wars" which used shots from the film of that name. When asked what they thought it was really telling them, only a fifth of the younger children said that it was about the biscuit; most thought it was "really" about the film action. In contrast, more than three-quarters of the older children thought the ad was about the biscuit. Young also interviewed eight- and ten-year-olds in the Manchester area, asking them to think of their "favourite" and "least favourite" ads. Their perceptions of ad categories were then elicited, and these became more sophisticated with age.

As part of a broader study of children's "television literacy", Buckingham (1993) conducted semi-structured group discussions about advertising with seven- to twelve-year-old London children from various social and ethnic backgrounds. He found that even the youngest children were aware of advertising's persuasive intent. However, like many adults, they thought that "other people" were more gullible than themselves. They displayed both technical knowledge and an understanding of narrative conventions, talking for example about hand-held camera shots or "cliffhanger" ads. They were also able to discuss why the producers of ads might have taken certain approaches, what reactions might be expected from the audience, and to whom particular ads may appeal. In general, the children appeared sceptical and cynical about ads, sometimes drawing on negative experiences of toys or cereal packets' "free gifts" which they had seen advertised. They criticised ad characters as well as technical details such as the quality of acting, dubbing, and editing, and there were also some criticisms of the way in which ads represented reality. There was also a strong sense of irony and mockery in many comments. Middle-class children appeared more critical of ads than others. However, as Buckingham notes, this may be because they were more adept at recognising the "implicit educational agenda" underlying the research project itself.

Another project of interest here was undertaken by Nava and Nava (1990). They note that young people are commonly thought to be either "duped" by, or discriminating consumers of, advertising. The latter view appears widely held in British advertising agencies. For example, one agency claimed that

> Young people are sophisticated, video literate and acutely sensitive to being patronised. They pick up cues and covert messages quicker than you would believe.
>
> (Bartle Bogle Hegarty, in Nava and Nava 1990:15).

The Nava and Nava research fed into a broader ethnographic study of the "creative symbolic elements of ordinary life" among young working class adults in the Wolverhampton area, many of whom were British-Asian or British Afro-Caribbean (Willis 1990). These young adults emerged as particularly astute at decoding complex messages, cross-references and visual jokes. As Nava and Nava (1990:16) observe,

> These critical skills are untutored and seem to arise out of an unprecedented intimacy with the cultural form of the television commercial. No other generation has been so imbued with the meanings produced by quick edits, long shots, zooms, by particular lighting codes and combinations of sound. The young have unique mastery of the grammar of the commercial...This is the case, even where, as one bemused advertiser put it, 'they are not very intellectually clever'.

In this context, Willis (1990:50) notes that young adults understand that ads juxtapose images and tunes, leaving them to make the connections. For example, one respondent described how she made sense of ads using music:

> You just listen carefully to the song so you can understand what the advert is trying to tell you. And when you see the pictures, you um try and work out what the song's got to do with that.

Taken together, these studies offer some insights into the nature of consumers' advertising literacy and raise issues regarding the social distribution of literacy according to age, gender and social class. In the search for further insights, the concept of literacy is now considered from a language and linguistics perspective.

3. LITERACY: A THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

In an etymological sense, "literacy" refers to the ability to read rather than write, and to understand rather than to produce (Graddol 1993a). Many definitions are broader, encompassing speech, writing and reading activities (Schieffelin and Gilmore 1986; Buckingham 1993). As Maybin (1993) observes, within the field of language and literacy studies, there has been a shift away from viewing literacy in terms of skills and competences, and towards investigating their role in social practice. The way in which literacy is bound up with its social and cultural context has been discussed by many researchers. Smith (1986) argues that different social groups have different ideas about what constitutes literacy, and how it should be displayed, acquired and used. Similarly, for Gee (1986), literacy refers to ways of using language and making sense of human experience. These "discourse practices" are tied to the beliefs and values of particular social or cultural groups, and to the sense of self among the people who practice them. Indeed, Street (1993:139) has proposed an "ideological model of literacy", which recognises

> ...a multiplicity of literacies; that the meaning and uses of literacy practices are related to specific cultural contexts; and that these practices are always associated with relations of power and ideology, they are not simply neutral technologies.

Implicit in such a view of literacy is a research agenda. Thus, Street argues that literacy practices, their cultural meanings and uses should be examined in various cultural and ideological contexts. Similarly, Rockhill (1987:240) calls for research to address "how literacy is actually lived in concrete practices and daily interactions".

Given these priorities, it is not surprising that a rich stream of ethnographic research has emerged in this area. Several researchers have addressed the social shaping of children's acquisition of literacy skills. For example, based on observation of storytelling occasions at a nursery school, Cochran-Smith (1986) examined how American children learned to apply to reading their knowledge of the world in general, literary conventions, narrative structure, and how to respond as audience members. Heath (1982) examined the ways in which pre-school children from three different South-eastern American communities were socialised into reading. She found that children in a predominantly middle-class community learned to offer "what-explanations", "reason explanations", "affective commentaries", and the social interaction patterns needed to demonstrate their skills to others. In a nearby working-class community, books were respected as a means of "getting ahead" and children were introduced to them at an early age. While their efforts were directed towards "what explanations", they were not encouraged to engage with books at an affective or analytical level. In another working-class community, which had rural rather than urban roots, books were not part of children's lives from an early age. Instead, children were socialised into an oral culture, in which analogical rather than analytical thinking was encouraged.

As different groups have different views about what "counts" as literacy, several studies have examined the depth and richness of marginalised literacy practices. For example, Gilmore (1986:155) argues that

> Children's play forms and peer social interactions often provide an unusually rich mode of expression for displays of language and literacy competence as well as for displays of culture and social relationships.

Gilmore refers to "sub-rosa" literacy skills as those owned and demonstrated in peer settings. He reports on the linguistic complexity of the games played outside an American school by students considered to be deficient in literacy skills. Girls played sophisticated "steps" or chanting games, while many boys were very involved in Dungeons and Dragons, a game requiring the comprehension of extremely complex material. Similarly, Camitta (1993, in Street 1993:146) found a large and creative body of unofficial or "self-sponsored" writing among Philadelphia high school students. Such writing included journals, diaries, and poems, and was often collaborative: it was performed, offered to others, commented upon, and revised.

These studies suggest that advertising literacy may be more than a neutral set of skills. Thus, we may expect it to be socially and culturally situated, bound up with

individuals' sense of identity, acquired and demonstrated in different ways by different social groups. Before the implications of such a perspective can be addressed, however, it is important to examine the validity of the term "advertising literacy".

3.1. The validity of "advertising literacy"

Graff (1982) argues that "literacy" should be restricted to written or printed materials, as it is learned in a way which differs from the acquisition of oral and nonverbal modes of communication. Dondis (1982) challenges the privileged position of verbal literacy in education, however. He suggests that "visual literacy" is neglected, because sight is considered more "natural" than the acquired skill of language. Given the advent of communication forms such as photography and film, Dondis argues that

> ...when what we see and sense is translated into surrogates by the new technology, then the need to explore the visual syntax by which intention is tied to expression and it to interpretation becomes apparent (p 2).

Discussing visual or television literacy, Dondis suggests that the term "literacy" is metaphoric, as we have little evidence that our comprehension of television and printed words are analogous. However, he argues that once literate readers have comprehended the words on a page, they effectively conduct a dialogue with the author, comparing what is said with their own knowledge, experience and values. He argues that the process of critical viewing is similar, so that the term "literacy" may be used:

> Both the reader and the viewer learn to be active - to challenge, analyse, react, explore, and understand the medium... (Dondis 1982:4)

Pattison (1982, in Buckingham 1993:20) also argues that literacy should not be tied to specific technologies or practices: what matters is a consciousness of questions raised by language, and mastery of the skills by which a particular culture manifests that consciousness. Buckingham (1993) suggests that the term "television literacy" assumes that television is a language, and that its mastery requires distinctive competencies. Similarly, Graddol (1993a:50) defines literacy as "the ability to produce, understand and use texts in culturally appropriate ways". This essentially recasts the debate about literacy into one about the nature of language, texts, and signifying systems. The next section, therefore, outlines some conceptual tools which should help in applying Buckingham's criteria to advertising.

3.1.1. Discourse, texts, semiotics and meaning

Watson et al (1989:57) define discourse as "a form, mode or genre of language". In linguistics, discourse analysis frequently addresses not only one speaker's utterances, but also the rules and conventions governing interaction between two or more speakers (O'Sullivan et al 1983). Related to the concept of discourse is that of the text. Turner (1988:122) describes a text as "a set of forms, relationships and meanings". Thus, films, music, speech, writing, paintings, and even ads may all be described as texts. As Graddol (1993a) points out, the term "text" is derived from a Latin word meaning "to weave". Thus, texts are substances created by the weaving of many threads. More formally, Graddol defines texts as communication artifacts, with a concrete or material existence of some kind. Traditionally, they refer to verbal entities, written or printed on paper. However, there has been much debate about the nature of a text's materiality. Thus, it may refer to physical material, such as ink and paper, or to "semiotic" material, such as words, images or music.

The terms "semiotics" and "semiology" derive from the Greek word for "sign", and the study of signs can be traced back to ancient times. Earlier this century, however, the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure proposed a science of "semiology" to study "the life of signs within society", their nature, and the laws which govern them. A similar project was suggested independently by the American philosopher Charles Saunders Peirce, in the name of "semiotics".

Saussure's theory of linguistics was published posthumously in 1915, but the 1966 translation of his work is the key source of his ideas in English-speaking countries. Saussure saw language as one of many sign systems, and argued that any sign has two parts, a signifier and a signified. The **signifier** is the sign's physical form, such as a word or photograph. The **signified** is the mental concept to which it refers. While the sign may be broken down into these two parts for analytical purposes, Saussure argued that the signifier and signified are as inseparable as the two sides of a coin. However, he also argued that the relationship between the two is arbitrary, arising from convention or cultural agreement rather than logical connections. As Grafton Small (1993:40) remarks,

> ...there is no binding reason why "bow tie" should be attached to a ribbon, or to a neck either, ties also being a matter of upbringing.

Saussure did however allow for a more logical or "motivated" link between signifier and signified. Thus, in the special case of symbols,

> ...there is a rudiment of a natural bond between the signifier and the signified. The symbol of justice, a pair of scales, could not be replaced by just another symbol, such as a chariot.
>
> (Saussure, in Berger 1988:8)

Given the usual arbitrariness of association between signifier and signified, Saussure suggested that meaning is derived in terms of oppositional relationships. For example, Graddol (1993a) notes that the English language titles for women used to involve a simple distinction between "Miss" and "Mrs", positioning them as single or married: if a woman were not one, she had to be the other. With the advent of the term "Ms", the meaning of the other two terms has changed. They now indicate a preference about the mode of address, and a willingness to be categorised in terms of marital status. This suggests that language organises and constructs our sense of reality, so that different languages provide and reflect different maps of reality. Turner (1988) points out that Australian Aboriginal languages have no word for money, as the function which it serves did not exist in their original culture. However, Story (1993) adds that Aboriginals have many words to describe the desert, just as Eskimos have over fifty words to describe snow.

According to Saussure, meaning depends on the way in which signs are chosen and combined. Various rules or conventions govern the combination of units: for language we have grammar, for music we have melody, and for clothes we have taste (Fiske 1982). Saussure used the term **langue** to describe the system of language as a social institution, its rules and conventions. **Parole**, on the other hand, refers to individual utterances or uses of language. As Storey observes, Saussure's approach focuses on the rules and conventions (langue) governing the production of meaning (parole).

Peirce's theory of semiotics is laid out in his collected writings between 1931 and 1958. He referred to three interdependent elements, the sign, the interpretant, and the object:

> A sign is something which stands to somebody for something in some respect or capacity. It addresses somebody, that is, creates in the mind of that person an equivalent sign, or perhaps a more developed sign. The sign which it creates I call the interpretant of the first sign. The sign stands for something, its object. (Peirce, in Fiske 1982:45)

As Fiske (1982) notes, there are similarities between Saussure's signifier and Peirce's sign, and between Saussure's signified and Peirce's interpretant. However, while Saussure focused on the internal structure of signifying systems, Peirce emphasised the social context of signs (Mick 1986). Thus, much of his work addressed acts of interpretation, and the ways in which meaning and knowledge are generated from

signs. For example, he discussed the iconic, indexical and symbolic dimensions of signs, and the ways in which we may relate them to objects. As Fiske (1982) observes, Peirce's "symbol" category is closest to Saussure's concept of the sign. Berger (1991) explains how Peirce's three dimensions may be related to objects, although he does not make it clear that a single sign may be related to an object in more than one way.

TABLE 4.2. BERGER'S ILLUSTRATION OF THREE ASPECTS OF SIGNS

	Icon	**Index**	**Symbol**
Signify by	resemblance	causal connections	conventions
Examples	pictures, statues	smoke/fire symptoms/disease	words, numbers, flags
Process	can see	can figure out	must learn

Source: A.A. Berger (1991) Media analysis techniques, Newbury Park, CA: Sage, p 5

Peirce's perspective emphasises the active and variable nature of meaning creation. Meaning does not reside in signs or the way in which they are structured. It is always generated in the "context of situation" (Malinowski 1923), by individuals who will make sense of signs in terms of their own background, experience and values. Thus, Anderson and Meyer (1988) argue that we are socially situated beings, constantly engaged in making sense of our environment and our lives. We do this by accommodating signs into the methods and practices of everyday life, and the routines of social action.

In order for communication to take place, however, there must be some degree of consensus between individuals about the meaning of signs. This tension between the idiosyncratic and the social is reflected in Hirschman's (1980) reference to individual, group, and common "layers of meaning", and Kleine and Kernan's (1988) discussion of meaning in terms of polysemy, contextual sensitivity, and consensus.

Poststructuralism (associated with the French philosopher Derrida) offers a less sanguine perspective on the potential for meaning to be realised. Scott (1992) notes that it develops Saussure's view of meaning as based on the organisation of signs in

relation to each other. Poststructuralism contends that meaning exists in the surface of an ever-changing web of signs, so that all language acts are essentially provisional and allusory. Every signification, then, is constructed from fragments of previous significations, which contain the traces of prior uses. These second-hand words and images are reassembled, and derive meaning from the way they shimmer against each other and their previous context. This play among the fragments is termed the "freeplay of the signifiers". Deconstructing signs, is thus playful but nihilistic: it involves unravelling their traces and associations, and ultimately reveals the hollowness of texts - they have no core or immutable structure. As Grafton-Small (1987:68) argues,

> ...whatever the meaning or value of a product, it is inherently unstable and difficult to grasp: it flows and drifts.

Postmodernism is associated with poststructuralism. As Featherstone (1991) observes, this term is both fashionable and elusive. Sherry (1991) describes it as a cross-disciplinary trend which encourages "sensitivity to differences and tolerance of the incommensurable". Similarly, Scott (1992) argues that it emphasises the multiplicity of viewpoints in intellectual discourse, distrusting transcendent principles and underlying structures. According to Brown (1993:21-22), postmodernism suggests that

> ...we should accept that knowledge is bounded, that our capacity to establish meaningful generalisations is limited, and, rather than seeking the impossibility of universal truths, we should rejoice in the ephemerality, contingency and diversity of the physical and human worlds as we experience them...

Graddol (1993b) notes that postmodern theories of language are mainly concerned with texts and how they are produced, used, and situated within other cultural practices. Thus, meaning is generated "ephemerally and precariously" from the interaction of contexts and the social activities of individuals. Furthermore, texts are seen as interdependent or interrelated entities, drawing on many sources and semiotic systems. Kristeva (1966, in Bullock et al 1988:436) introduced the concept of intertextuality, arguing that texts are not isolated phenomenon, but draw on a "mosaic of quotations" from many others.

Various definitions of intertextuality expand on the notion of interrelatedness. Berger (1991) defines it as the conscious or unconscious use in one text of material from others. While this focuses on the encoding of a message, others explain it in terms of decoding. Thus, Fiske (1982) and Cook (1992) refer to the way in which

meanings generated from one text are determined partly by the meanings of other apparently similar texts. Fiske (1989a, b) contends that popular culture is especially intertextual. He describes popular texts as having "leaky boundaries": they flow into each other and into everyday life, and cannot be understood without this context. Given this focus on the transience and social context of meaning, Frith and Horne (1987, in Storey 1993:179) suggest that

> In the end, the postmodern debate concerns the source of meaning...Who has the right to interpret? For pessimists and rationalists...the answer is multinational capital...For pessimists and irrationalists...the answer is nobody at all...For optimists...the answer is consumers themselves, stylists and subculturalists, who take the goods on offer and make their own marks with them.

In this context, Jenkins (1992) refers to fans of television programmes such as Star Trek as "textual poachers", an active audience or interpretive community, who construct the meaning of their favourite programmes by appropriating elements from them and accommodating them into the practices of their everyday lives. If advertising may be considered a form of language or a signifying system, the implications are clear: the meaning of ads is not inherent, but depends on the active participation of their audience. The next section, then, examines whether advertising is a signifying system.

3.1.2. Is advertising a signifying system?

There have been various attempts to compare verbal language and the symbolic systems of visual arts, particularly in the field of film theory. For example, Turner (1988) describes film as a "language-like system", referring to its "minimal grammar" and "less stable sets of conventions". Buckingham (1993) suggests that instead of seeking to reduce film language to its smallest elements or define its syntactic system in an abstract manner, theorists should focus on its "communicative context", or the way in which film changes according to its historical and cultural setting, and the active nature of audience interpretations of film.

As advertising is not limited to any one medium, we may expect even greater problems in specifying a precise grammar for it. Indeed, Williamson (1978:12) has argued that advertising and verbal language are not comparable

> ...in the sense that a language has particular identifiable constituent parts and its words are predetermined. The components of advertising are variable...and not necessarily part of one language or social discourse.

Furthermore, advertising has been found to change over time (Leiss et al 1986, 1990) and according to its cultural context (Weinberger and Spotts 1989; Katz and Lee 1992). This suggests that if language theories are to be applied to advertising, a similar approach to that suggested by Buckingham (1993) should be taken: theorists should focus on advertising's social, historical and communicative context.

This is not to say that traditional linguistic theory cannot be applied to some extent to advertising. For example, Young (1986, 1990) draws on research concerning children's "metalingusitic competencies" to address their development of advertising literacy. He argues that children's developing awareness and scepticism with respect to advertising is part of a general growth in "metacomunicative" abilities. In middle childhood, they become increasing able to stand back from language and other communication forms, and reflect on how they work. They become more aware of specific characteristics of language, learning to distinguish between what is said and how it is said. Thus, they become more aware of utterances which are not intended literally, such as expressions which are ambiguous, metaphorical, hyperbolic, or ironic. As these devices are common in advertising, children's' advertising literacy develops with their command of language.

Various American and European researchers have treated ads as texts and analysed them using the tools of linguistics and literary criticism. For example, Saussure's theories have been applied in some form to ads by Barthes (1964), Leymore (1975), Williamson (1978), Grafton-Small and Linstead (1989) and Wernick (1991). A typology of rhetorical figures to describe advertising imagery was developed by Durand (1970, in Dyer 1982; 1987), while others such as Stern (1988, 1990) and McQuarrie and Mick (1992, 1993) have analysed ads for their use of metaphor and other figurative language. Scott (1990, 1991, 1992) has examined the language of music, celebrities and visual elements in ads, while Mick (1987) has shown that ads may be analysed in terms of story grammars. Finally, the relevance of feminist literary criticism to critiques of advertising has been demonstrated by Stern (1989, 1993).

Such studies typically move beyond the internal structure of advertising texts to consider their social and cultural context. For example, Barthes (1964) analyses a print ad for a food company which consists mainly of a photograph of groceries spilling out of a string bag. He distinguishes between the denotative or literal image, and the connotative or symbolic image. He points out that the range of possible connotative readings is due to individual differences in practical, national, cultural

and aesthetic knowledge. As ads use external and socially situated codes, concepts, and myths, they are bound up with and construct ideology. Similarly, Williamson (1978) discusses the "overt" and "latent" meaning in ads. She argues that for latent meaning to be generated, the significance of one object has to be transferred to another. This process of meaning transfer can only be accomplished by an ad's audience: it does not take place within the ad itself. Furthermore, one object has to be meaningful, to be part of the audience's reservoir of social and cultural knowledge (Leiss et al 1990), if its significance is to be transferred to another object.

McCracken (1986) sees the world of everyday experience as "culturally constituted" in two ways. Firstly, culture is a **lens** through which we see the world: it shapes how we apprehend and assimilate phenomena. Secondly, culture is a **blueprint** for human activity: it shapes our social action and the way in which we fashion the world. Like Williamson, McCracken argues that advertising juxtaposes consumer goods with representations of the world, and when the audience relates the two,

> The known properties of the culturally constituted world come to reside in the unknown properties of the consumer good...[which] now stands for a cultural meaning of which it was previously innocent...(pp 74-75)

McCracken also emphasises that in the process of meaning transfer, the audience is "the final author", whose participation is essential. For example, the current Guinness campaign juxtaposes the actor Rutger Hauer with the stout. In addition to being shown drinking it, Hauer resembles a pint of Guinness: he is a blonde man dressed in black. He is significant to the audience in his own right: he appears cool, mysterious, intelligent, and to have an off-beat sense of humour. However, for meaning transfer to take place, the audience must interpret these cues, and make the connection between Hauer's personality and the pint of Guinness. As he has also appeared in various films portraying similar or more sinister characters, some viewers may connect that extra layer of meaning to the drink.

This example indicates the intertextual nature of advertising. As a mass-mediated form of popular culture, it should not be surprising that there are "leaky boundaries" between it and other communication forms (Fiske 1989 a,b). Leiss et al (1990:193) suggest that as advertising exists at the interface between the worlds of products, media, and consumers,

> The substance and images woven into advertising messages are appropriated and distilled from an unbounded range of cultural references. Advertising borrows its ideas, its language and its visual representations from literature and design, from other media content and forms, from history and the future, and from its own experience...The borrowed references are fused with products and returned to cultural discourse.

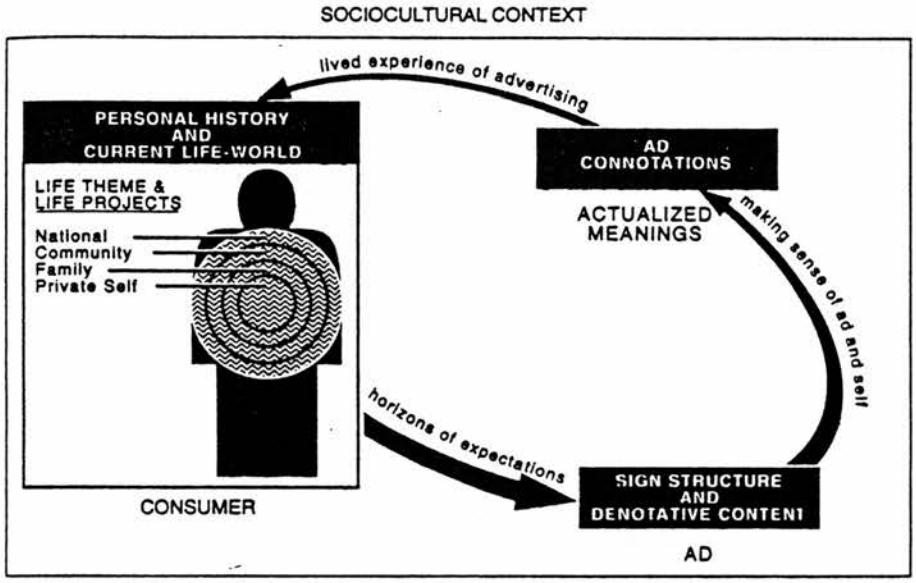
The fusion of advertising and art discourses has been examined by Berger (1972), Caudle (1989), Nava and Nava (1990) and Scott (1992), among others. Cook (1992) describes advertising as a "parasitic" discourse, almost to the extent that it has no separate identity. He does not intend this as criticism, but uses Levi-Strauss's notion of "bricolage". This refers to the work of "bricoleurs", who made or fixed things with whatever was to hand from previous odd jobs (Williamson 1978). In an advertising context, "bricolage" describes the borrowing and interweaving of other discourse types in advertising. Cook (1992:34) argues that denigrating such a process implies a misguided belief in "the possibility and the virtue of original and autonomous discourse". Similarly, Barthes (1971:160) criticised the "myth of filiation". He argued that it is pointless to seek the "sources" or "influences" for a particular work, because

> ...the citations which go to make up a text are anonymous, untraceable, and yet already read: they are quotations without inverted commas.

Wernick (1991) suggests that ads, more than other texts, do not stand alone. Their signs, conventions and values are drawn from a "common cultural pool" which exists in society at a particular point in time. They may also be reworked by advertising and fed back into other cultural forms, a process facilitated by the increasing institutional ties between advertising, commercial media and mass entertainment (Nava and Nava 1990, Scott 1992). Furthermore, Wernick observes that as advertising has become more pervasive, it has become recognised as a point of cultural reference in its own right. This means that ads may draw on, and even make explicit reference to, other ads, so that their meanings become interdependent among themselves, and the process of communication in advertising becomes self-conscious and self-referencing. Similarly, Cook (1992) refers to the use of intra- and inter-discoursal allusion in advertising, in that ads frequently assume knowledge of other ads, or evoke knowledge of other discourse types such as films. As a result of interdependence within advertising and between advertising and the media, Wernick (1991:121) argues that

> To be caught up as a cultural consumer in the vortex of promotional signs...is to be engulfed, semiotically, in a swirling stream of signifiers whose only meaning in the end is the circulatory process which it anticipates, represents and impels.

Nonetheless, individual consumers are still required to create some meaning from ads, however provisional it may be. Mick and Politi (1989) discuss "the hell of connotation" involved in interpreting ads. They asked students to "describe what's going on" in the picture of a gin ad, and used the responses to demonstrate the range, complexity, inconsistencies and idiosyncrasies of advertising interpretations. Subsequently, Mick and Buhl (1992) present a meaning-based model of advertising experiences (Figure 4.1). This views consumers as embedded in a sociocultural context, which is largely inherited and maintained or modified in their lifetime. Consumers accumulate particular life histories, and develop personal themes and projects. **Life themes** are "profound existential concerns" addressed consciously or otherwise in our daily lives. They tend to be limited in number, stable over time, enabling and delimiting our interpretation of texts. **Life projects** refer to our development, refinement, and disposal of particular concepts (such as career or family) from a range of culturally established alternatives. We have many life projects, and they are in a constant state of flux. This, then, is the context in which we negotiate the meaning of ads.



National Life Projects involve meanings associated with nationalities and internationality.
Community Life Projects involve meanings associated with residential areas, peer groups and careers.
Family Life Projects involve meanings associated with family members, including parents, siblings, spouse, and children.
The Private Self Life Project involves meanings associated with being an individuated human being, including personal activities and interests.

A pervasive *Life Theme* such as being active versus being passive.

Figure 4.1. A meaning-based model of advertising experiences

Source: D.G. Mick and C. Buhl (1992) "A meaning-based model of advertising experiences", Journal of Consumer Research, 19, December, p 319

Applying their model, Mick and Buhl conducted two semi-structured interviews with each of three Danish brothers. Prior to the first interview, five "image" ads were selected from magazines read by all the brothers. Each brother was then asked to talk about his "experience" of the ads. The second phase of the research, conducted three months later, obtained a "miniature but detailed life history of each brother". Analysis of the interview data supported the model. Life themes were identified for each brother. They shared concerns with social status, but also had individual concerns, defined by the researchers as being free, being true to the self, and defining the self respectively. The brothers' life themes and various life projects appeared to be intertwined with their experience of the ads. Mick and Buhl (1992:333) conclude that

> ...idiosyncratic meanings are more than mere error variance. In fact, they are demonstrably significant and relatively patterned when observed across ads and analyzed against the backdrop of the individual's life history and current life-world.

In summary, then, while advertising lacks the formal grammar associated with verbal language, it seems to be a rich and complex signifying system. It is not limited to one medium, but draws on many other texts and discourses, and is shaped by its historical and cultural context. Furthermore, its meaning is activated by the participation of its audience, whose interpretations reflect their own experiences, social situation and concerns. This suggests that there is scope for the concept of advertising literacy. However, using Buckingham's (1993) framework, there still remains the question of whether understanding ads requires a unique set of skills.

3.1.3. Are distinctive competencies needed to understand advertising?

Salomon's (1982) work on television literacy suggests ways of approaching this question from an advertising perspective. He argues that television is a complex symbol system, with some elements common to other media and others unique to it. He offers three sequential stages for understanding television programmes. Messages are first formed into mental representations, and these elements are then "chunked" into meaningful units. Finally, the material has to be elaborated upon in some way, perhaps by making inferences or asking questions. Salomon argues that competence at the lower stages is acquired at an early age and soon becomes automatic. He considers literacy to be media-specific only at the lower stages, as higher stages draw on more general skills. This echoes Dondis's (1982) view that reading and viewing skills converge once a basic message is understood.

Buckingham challenges this perspective. At a fundamental level, he argues that Salomon presents skills in an abstract, mechanistic way, undermining the importance of the social and cultural contexts in which they are practiced. Buckingham also questions the sequential nature of the model, arguing that inferences are likely to be made even by those with little experience. Furthermore, he argues that the process of making inferences differs according to medium: we may make visual inferences when reading a book, while being told about characters' motivations or attitudes. Watching television, such visual inferences are less significant, but we often have to infer actors' motives and character from their behaviour. Thus, media-specific skills are not only relevant at the lowest level.

Based on practitioners' observations and the limited empirical work reviewed earlier, the components of advertising literacy may be summarised as:

- possession of a specialised vocabulary to describe and evaluate ads
- awareness of a range of advertising objectives, styles and emotional appeals
- appreciation of technical aspects of advertising
- use of various cues to make inferences about brands or brand claims

It may be argued that advertising literacy does not require a unique set of skills: film and television literacy also draw upon audiences' abilities to categorise and make inferences, and their understanding of editing and lighting conventions. However, as Buckingham argues, advertising is a "special case", since its persuasive intent is relatively apparent.

Thus, advertising literacy requires skills to be applied in a distinctive way, mediating between the worlds of advertising, goods and consumers. In this sense, we may indeed consider advertising literacy to require distinctive competencies. Some elaboration on the nature of these competencies is provided by a Boston University coursebook on "television literacy" (Bichan et al 1982) which includes a section on persuasive programming. While it notes that "persuasion" includes political and network promotions, the section focused on the advertising of goods and services. Presumably, the authors believed that an understanding of the issues outlined there constitutes "advertising literacy". These issues are summarised in Table 4.3.

Such a list certainly begins to address the skills involved in understanding advertising. However, it is worth reiterating earlier arguments that literacy cannot be reduced to a neutral set of skills, isolated from any social or cultural context. The implications of this perspective for advertising are considered next.

TABLE 4.3. THE BOSTON UNIVERSITY VIEW OF "ADVERTISING LITERACY"

* Amount of persuasion on television
* Nature of ad "treatments" and "storyboards"

* **Objectives**:
  exposure, attention, interest, credibility, recognition, memorability

* **Appeals**:
  rational and/or emotional

* **The hierarchy of needs**
  physiological, safety, love, esteem, self-actualisation

* **Arousal techniques**:

visual:	incongruous elements, complexity, quick cuts, slow motion, animation, visual distortion, personification
verbal:	loudness, speed of soundtrack, familiar music, sound effects, startling statements

* **Claims**:
  verbal or visual; of tangible or psychological benefits
  use of logical fallacies

  Ways of boosting credibility:
  endorsements, surveys, demonstrations

  Common forms and structures:
  testimonial / endorsements, documentary, problem-solution-reward, scientific tests / demonstrations, pure entertainment,

* **Effects**:

benefits:	information, entertaining
harmful effects:	materialism, consumption, simplification of issues
boomerang influence:	unintended long-term effects, such as stereotyping

* **Research**:
  on products, image, consumer motivations and segments, ad effectiveness

Source: V. Bichan, B. Gangelhoff, W. Lubars, and K. Upjohn (1982) Television literacy: critical television viewing skills, Boston, MA: Dendron Press, pp 51-81

4. THE IMPLICATIONS OF ADVERTISING LITERACY

According to Gordon (1984:1), the advertising industry welcomes "the sophisticated consumer of advertising", as

> ...it gives a licence for a more 'creative' approach to advertising. If sophisticated consumers can appreciate the Benson and Hedges poster advertisements then it follows that 'anything goes'.

Furthermore, she claims that an understanding of a target market's "advertising typology profile" would complement advertisers' understanding of those consumers' brand attitudes and usage. She argues that it would also be helpful in the development of advertising strategy, creative execution and media planning. However, Gordon does not explicitly discuss the implications of her finding that "sophisticated consumers" are not necessarily sympathetic towards advertising. This could perhaps lead to more calls for regulation of advertising, with notions of "misleading" material, for example, being applied to increasingly subtle aspects of ads.

Commenting on The Research Business's 1989 study, Setford (1990) suggests that advertising can "assume a great deal" of consumers and that efforts should be made to create challenging, intriguing and surprising ads, without sacrificing credibility or brand relevance. Ryan (1990:1) is more wide-ranging in her analysis of the study's implications. She emphasises the importance of consumers' professional language, as people develop words to describe things which have some importance to them. Furthermore,

> ...not only can words reflect change in our society, but the existence of the appropriate vocabulary can accelerate and reaffirm change.

Thus, consumers' development of a vocabulary to describe and evaluate advertising may serve to deepen their understanding. However, Ryan also reminds advertising researchers of the difference between "knowledge" and "effect". Advertising aims to gain consumer identification with the ad and reappraisal of the brand. This suggests the need to distinguish between cynical acknowledgment of accurate targeting ("this ad is aimed at me") and a natural affinity ("I like this ad"). Ryan also suggests that as "lifestyle" advertising decreases, consumer's affinity with ads will be based on more abstract and intangible factors rather than identification with or aspiration towards the lifestyles portrayed.

Among those less concerned about the managerial implications of advertising

literacy, other issues have been raised. Buckingham (1993) notes that children's mistrust of advertising must pose problems for advertisers. However, Aitken et al (1985, 1988 a,b) point out that if children can decode and enjoy the imagery used in ads for cigarettes and alcohol, it cannot be assumed that these do not influence them. Nava and Nava (1990) suggest that young adults withstood the influence of advertising by consuming ads independently of the products which they featured.

Thus, it seems that the concept of advertising literacy raises questions about the relationship between consumers and advertisers as much as that between consumers and ads. However, advertising researchers have hardly begun to consider issues raised by social theories of language and literacy. In particular, while we have begun to address what advertising literacy might **be**, we have hardly considered what it might be **for**: what purpose does it serve in the "concrete practices and daily interactions" (Rockhill 1987:240) of different social groups?

Rockhill points out that literacy is traditionally considered empowering in terms of economic development, equal opportunities, and even liberty and democracy. To what extent, if any, may we consider advertising literacy empowering? Does it simply make consumers less easily "duped" by individual ads, or are there wider implications? In this context, Nava and Nava wonder whether young people's possession of complex decoding skills may be "progressive", enabling them to resist and contest the logic of consumer capitalism. They suggest that the critical tools, and the pleasure which they generate, may help fragment existing networks of power and knowledge.

Based on his research concerning children and television, Buckingham (1993:33) argues for a "social theory of television literacy", which acknowledges

> ...that children's use of television is an integral part of the texture of their daily lives, and of their relationships with the family and the peer group...that the competencies which are involved in making sense of television are not equally available, but socially distributed, and that they are intimately connected with the operation of social power...different social groups may employ different "television literacies", or different modalities of literacy, which have different social and ideological functions and consequences.

This suggests that in seeking to understand the implications of advertising literacy, we may benefit from considering the ways in which audiences use the mass media, and the ways in which different social groups may make sense of them. Therefore, the literature on mass media uses and gratifications and the decoding of messages is examined next.

5. USES AND GRATIFICATIONS THEORY AND RESEARCH

According to uses and gratifications theory, the mass media constitute a resource which audiences draw upon to satisfy various needs. The theory was first formally outlined by Katz (1959). He suggested that communication research should reverse the traditional question of what the media do to people, and ask instead what people do with the media. This formulation was not entirely original, but was based on a research stream which emerged in the 1940s as an antidote to the "magic bullet" approach to mass communication. This viewed the media as exerting powerful and direct influence on individuals' behaviour and beliefs, but was undermined by findings on selective perception, individual differences and social processes. Research in these areas indicated that audiences were active in their selection of content and messages from the mass media. Thus, in the 1940s, various studies examined the ways audiences used various media and genres such as classical radio music, radio soap operas, and daily newspapers (Severin and Tankard 1988; De Fleur and Ball-Rokeach 1989; O'Guinn and Faber 1991).

Katz et al (1973, 1975) outline the basic assumptions of a uses and gratifications approach. Firstly, the audience is active, and thus much mass media use is goal-directed. Secondly, the initiative in linking need gratification with media choice lies largely with the audience member. Thirdly, the media compete with other sources of need satisfaction. Finally, the gratifications sought from the media include diversion and entertainment as well as information, and these will vary according to the social roles and psychological disposition of individual audience members. Thus, as Willis (1990:36-37) has argued,

> 'Effects' are the result...of the whole creative relation of viewers with what they see...The audience is not an empty room waiting to be furnished in someone else's taste.

5.1. Media uses: classifications and criticisms

A wide range of personal and interpersonal uses of the mass media have been offered. Lasswell (1948) suggested that the media facilitates the transmission of social heritage, surveillance of the environment, and the "correlation", or selection and interpretation, of information. Adding entertainment to that list, Wright (1959) anticipated a category which assumed great importance in other typologies. For example, Stephenson (1967) emphasised the opportunities for play and pleasure,

while McQuail et al (1972) found escapism to be the most common motivation attributed to mass media audiences.

Schramm et al (1961) referred to deferred/reality and immediate/fantasy rewards, and Weiss (1971) suggested that the media may satisfy informational-educational and fantasist-escapist needs. These resemble the surveillance and diversion categories offered by McQuail et al (1972), who also suggested that the media may satisfy needs relating to personal identity and relationships. Similarly, Katz et al (1973) proposed that our mass media needs may be cognitive, affective, or both, and oriented towards our sense of self or the social environment.

More recently, Lull (1980, 1990) proposed a comprehensive framework for assessing the social uses of the mass media. He suggested that these may be structural or relational. **Structural uses** could be environmental (providing background noise, companionship, or entertainment) or regulative (structuring time, activity or talk). **Relational uses** were fourfold: the mass media could facilitate communication, social learning, interpersonal affiliation or avoidance, and the demonstration of competence or dominance. Discussing affiliation and avoidance uses, Lull refers to the opportunities which watching television provides for physical closeness. Control of the remote control device often reflected patterns of power in a home, and opportunities to demonstrate competence were provided by quiz shows or foreign language programmes.

Uses and gratifications research has been challenged on various grounds. Firstly, while it assumes that the audience is active and in control, Lometti et al (1977) argue that uses and gratifications are mediators of rather than substitutes for media effects, and Barratt (1990) questions the view that there are no "hidden messages" in media content.

Some analysts have also doubted the validity of self-reports on the uses sought or gratifications obtained from the media. They argue that this approach is too simplistic, given the complexity of human motivation (Severin and Tankard 1988, McLeod and Becker 1981). The means of obtaining such self-reports have also been questioned. Many studies have used multiple-choice questionnaires based on categories specified by researchers. Lometti et al (1977) criticise such approaches, but also suggest that there may be problems with in-depth interviews: for example, respondents may wish to appear more rational than they actually are. This is not consistent with the range of fantasy, play and escape uses identified in studies

conducted by McQuail et al (1972), however. Becker (1979) found some respondents were unable to specify the gratifications obtained from media use when asked open-ended questions, although they readily identified these from a list of alternatives. Given such concerns about self-reports, open-ended and multiple-choice questions, Lull's (1980, 1990) ethnographic approach seems promising. Rather than relying on standardised questionnaires, administered out of the viewing context to individuals, he used participant observation and in-depth interviews with family members in their own homes.

Concern has also been expressed about the limited scope of uses and gratification research. Palmgreen et al (1981) argue that there is still much to learn about the relationship between gratifications sought and obtained, their antecedents, and the ways in which they relate to media behaviour. This suggests a research agenda similar to those proposed for attitudes and involvement by consumer researchers.

Broader, more complex and systematic models of uses and gratifications have also been advocated by those such as Morley (1980), McLeod and Becker (1981) and Barratt (1990). These authors criticise the focus on common needs, rather than the different uses to which various social groups may put the media. In particular, Morley has called for research linking different patterns of gratifications sought with the meanings and interpretations given to specific messages. His own qualitative research on different interpretations of one television programme, and on family television viewing, demonstrates the promise of such an approach (Morley 1980, 1986).

Finally, uses and gratifications research has been criticised for being vague and atheoretical. It has been accused of simply restating some aspects of selective influence theories, offering little more than a data collection strategy or lists of reasons for attending to the mass media (DeFleur and Ball-Rokeach 1989, Severin and Tankard 1988). Indeed, as O'Guinn and Faber (1991:354) observe,

> ...its critics claim that it is so broadly conceived as to be unwieldy, poorly specified, imprecise, and in some sense so intuitive as to be trivial.

Taken together, these criticisms may indicate that much research in this tradition is methodologically flawed and theoretically redundant. However, Severin and Tankard argue that it is valuable even as an antidote to the emphasis elsewhere on the persuasion of passive audiences. Indeed, it could be argued that it has yet to achieve its potential. As we have seen, there have been calls for more

comprehensive and theoretically integrated models. There are some encouraging signs in this respect. For example, Levy and Windahl (1984) expand the concept of the active audience. They observe that people may be active in terms of media selection, involvement, and use, and that such activity may occur before, during or after exposure to the media. Morley (1980, 1986) offers some insights into how uses and gratifications and the social context of viewing television may be related. Furthermore, he and Lull (1980, 1990) have offered some guidance on the use of more sensitive research methods for exploring such issues.

5.2. Advertising applications

There is at least a quarter-century of implicit support among advertising practitioners, particularly in Britain, for a uses and gratifications approach in advertising research. Joyce (1967) insisted that "the consumer is not passive, helpless advertising fodder", while Hedges (1974) suggested that it might be more useful to think less about what advertising does to people, and more about what people do with advertising. Similarly, McDonald (1980) decried the "myth of causality" which implied that each ad had its own electric charge to be "transmitted to its victim on impact". He argued that the consumer is not passive but chooses to pay attention, and that an ad's only value is that which the consumer gives it. Similarly, Meadows (1983) talked about active, sophisticated "consumers of advertising", and Lannon (1985) observed that consumers expect advertising to provide aesthetic, emotional or intellectual rewards. In America, Schlinger (1979a) listed many "positive rewards of advertising", such as entertainment, product and "incidental" information, and opportunities for self-enhancing empathy or identification. However, it appears that many practitioners and researchers have not accepted the implications of such a perspective: Lannon still finds herself having to argue the case for a "new model" of humanistic advertising (Lannon and Cooper 1983) to inform the development and evaluation of advertising,

> ...because the common strand running through the entire process starts from the same basis, the question of what do people do with advertising: how do they use it? And what do they use it for? (Lannon 1992:16)

Thus, there is some support within the advertising industry for a view of advertising consumers as active and seeking various rewards from their encounters with ads. While some of those rewards may resemble the categories emerging from research

on the mass media in general, little work has explicitly addressed the uses and gratifications of advertising.

Interestingly, some of the earliest work in this area comes from America. For example, Moschis and Churchill (1978) examined the process of consumer socialisation among 12-18 year-olds. They referred to "social utility reasons" for watching television ads, such as using them to gather information about lifestyles and behaviours associated with the use of consumer products. Subsequently, Moschis (1980) examined women's information requirements with respect to cosmetics. He found that information was sought (from advertising and other sources) for a variety of social motivations, such as social comparison or as a basis for conversation with others.

Discussing the relationship between children and television advertising, Uusitalo (1986) suggests similar roles for advertising, referring to its cognitive/informative, affective/ aesthetic, and integrative/social functions. Crosier (1983) proposed seven kinds of satisfaction which may motivate us to consume advertising: product information, entertainment, implied warranty, value addition, post-purchase reassurance, vicarious experience, and involvement. Vicarious experience is the opportunity to experience situations or lifestyles to which we would not otherwise have access. Involvement in this context refers to the intellectual pleasure of participation in the puzzles or jokes offered by some advertisements.

More recently, Mick and Buhl's (1992) interviews with the three Danish brothers offer some support for McCracken's (1987:122) suggestion that in looking at ads, consumers are seeking

> ...concepts of what it is to be a man or a woman, concepts of what it is to be middle aged...[or] a member of a community and a country...he or she is looking for symbolic resources, new ideas and better concrete versions of old ideas with which to advance their project.

Alwitt and Prabhaker (1992) also draw on uses and gratifications theory in modelling consumers' attitudes to television advertising. As we have seen in Chapter Two, they suggest that consumers' attitudes are related to the functions which advertising serves for them. They incorporated hedonic, knowledge, social learning or contact, and value affirmation functions in their model, and found all four were related to attitudes.

Buttle (1990, 1991) reviews various studies on the role of television advertising in interpersonal communication, and the social context of advertising reception. These

studies used a wide range of methods, including participant observation and qualitative interviews. In general, they indicate a limited role for advertising in generating conversation, although children sometimes used it to initiate or influence interaction with family members, or for ideas for play. These studies are valuable in that they locate advertising within the sphere of everyday life, suggest dialectical relationships between people and advertisements, and use methods which are open to exploring the nature of such relationships. However, many of the studies in Buttle's review are limited to parent-child interactions, at the point of ad exposure or product purchase. This raises questions of advertising uses between other people and beyond those occasions.

Some insight into this area is provided by Nava and Nava (1990) and Willis (1990). Commenting on their ethnographic research programme concerning young adults' meanings and interpretations of popular cultural forms, they argue that young people enjoy decoding complex messages, jokes and cross-references in advertising, and use them as "tokens" in social exchanges.

As O'Guinn and Faber (1991:358) observe, a uses and gratifications perspective on advertising is attractive, as

> It sees consumers as having many different agenda, and as using advertising for many purposes other than those intended by advertisers...

Thus, as a part of the mass media, advertising may be used to satisfy a range of needs. Some of these, such as information, reassurance, and added value, may be related directly to the advertiser's marketing strategies. Other needs, such as personal identity, social relationships and vicarious experience may not be related to such strategies. In order to appreciate the implications of advertising being used for such a range of purposes, the literature on decoding is now addressed.

6. DECODING: THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

In addressing the question of decoding, two perspectives are of interest. The marketing communications tradition is based on Schramm's (1955) encoding/decoding model and on cognitive response theory. While there is some recognition of the need for a common "field of experience" between participants, it addresses this issue in a limited way. In contrast, work in the field of cultural studies

considers in some detail the implications of audience experiences and social context for the decoding of mass communication messages.

6.1. A marketing communications perspective

Based on a bibliometric analysis of marketing textbooks, Buttle (1990) refers to Wilbur Schramm as one of five "key ancestral communication theorists" whose work underpins current marketing communication theory. His work is of interest here because his discussion of communication pays particular attention to the concept of decoding. Schramm (1955) suggested that communication always requires three elements: a source, a message, and a destination or receiver. For communication to take place, the source must "encode" the message into a form which allows it to be transmitted to the destination, and the destination must in turn "decode" or interpret it. The encoding/decoding process is not necessarily symmetrical, however: once a message is coded and sent, the source no longer has control over it, and the destination may decode it in ways which were not intended by the source. Furthermore, Schramm (1955:6) argued that

> The source can encode, and the destination can decode, only in terms of the experience each has had.

Thus, Schramm built in a "field of experience" element into his model, arguing that the greater the overlap between the fields of experience of sender and receiver, the easier it would be for them to communicate. He suggested that senders of messages should know their audience thoroughly, so that messages could be encoded in relevant language and appeal to appropriate attitudes and values. McQuail (in Fiske and Hartley 1980:79) elaborates on this aspect of the model. He suggests that communication effects will be greatest when the message is consistent with the existing opinions, beliefs and dispositions of the receiver. Secondly, communication can produce most effective shifts on unfamiliar, lightly felt, peripheral issues which do not lie at the centre of the receiver's value system. Thirdly, the social context, group or reference group will mediate the communication and influence whether or not it is accepted.

Kotler (1991) uses Schramm's (1955) model as the basis for his discussion of marketing communication. He defines encoding as "the process of putting thought into symbolic form", and decoding as "the process by which the receiver assigns meaning to the symbols transmitted by the sender". He refers to "interference"

during the communication process and explains that selective attention, distortion or retention of messages by an audience member may prevent the intended message from being received. He separates the process of decoding from a consumer's response to a message, which he defines as "the set of reactions that the receiver has after being exposed to the message". Finally, "message rehearsal" is the receiver's elaboration on the meaning of the information in a way that brings into short-term memory related thoughts previously stored in long-term memory.

Unfortunately Kotler (1991) does not explain whether he views rehearsal as part of the decoding or response process, or something different yet again. Within the marketing and advertising literature, however, the decoding process appears to have been addressed primarily in terms of rehearsal or cognitive response. Such research, reviewed in Chapter Two, does not appear to recognise sufficiently that meaning depends on interactions between information, individuals' values, experiences and attitudes, and their environment.

Mitchell (1983) appears to go some way towards accommodating these issues. He suggests that consumers can choose the attention and depth of processing to give to a particular message, and that such choices are influenced by factors relating to the stimulus, the individual, and the environment. Stimulus factors refer to the content, structure, and medium of messages. Individual factors concern consumers' prior knowledge and goal hierarchy. While this appear quite broad, Mitchell restricts knowledge and goals to the context of products. Similarly, environmental factors are limited to distracting stimuli. Thus, Mitchell defines the three groups of factors so narrowly that they offer little more than a superficial statement of the obvious.

Olson's (1979) discussion of schema theory offers a richer understanding of individual-level factors influencing cognitive responses. He describes schemata as cognitive frameworks within which new information is interpreted and assigned meaning: they contain and organise our knowledge of stimuli and contexts, as well as our processing "rules" for responding to them. Unfortunately for our purposes, he terms this "encoding" rather than "decoding"! Olson (1979:157-8) argues that we need to

> ...consider a consumer's existing schemas or knowledge structures in order to understand the encoding process and the traces produced during encoding...certainly several consumers would not be expected to generate identical memory traces on exposure to a single ad.

Thus, it seems that there has been some, but insufficient, recognition within the

advertising literature of the importance of individuals' values, experiences, attitudes and environment to the way in which they may decode advertising messages. Such issues have received considerable attention in the field of cultural studies, and work in this area may offer some useful insights into the interaction between ads, audiences and their environment.

6.2. A cultural studies perspective

Hall (1973) discusses the way in which meaning is created through the interaction of signs and socially situated audience members. Examining television messages, he suggests that the structure of communication elements delimits their meanings, and that all societies or cultures try to impose certain views about the social, cultural, and political world on their members. Thus, messages are encoded to suggest "preferred readings", reinforcing the institutional, political or ideological order. Such messages are nevertheless polysemic, as

> There can never be only one, single, univocal and determined meaning for [a communication element], but depending on how its integration within the code has been accomplished, its possible meanings will be organised within a scale which runs from dominant to subordinate...there can be no law to ensure that the receiver will take the preferred or dominant meaning...in precisely the way in which it has been encoded by the producer. (Hall 1973:13)

Hall relates this view of encoding and decoding to concerns expressed by television producers about messages failing to "get across" to audiences. Recognising that individual "misunderstandings" may exist, he argues that decodings which differ from those intended by encoders cannot simply be attributed to poor encoding, or even to psychological factors such as selective perception. Thus, while literal, denotative "errors" are generally unproblematic, Hall (1973:16) argues that

> ..."misreadings" at a connotative or contextual level are a different matter. They have, fundamentally, a societal, not a communicative, basis. They signify, at the "message" level the structural conflicts, contradictions and negotiations of economic, political and cultural life.

Indeed, as Eco (1972, in Morley 1974:6) has suggested, the gap between transmitted and received messages can serve to broaden the receiver's freedom. In this context, Hall proposes three "ideal-type" positions from which audiences may decode television messages:

1. A **dominant reading** occurs when viewers accept the connoted preferred meaning "full and straight", decoding the message in terms of the reference-code in which it has been encoded.

2. A **negotiated reading** may be full of contradictions. It contains both adaptive and oppositional elements, for example by accepting the dominant definition of events, but making some modifications in applying it to local conditions.
3. An **oppositional reading** recognises the inflection given to an event but decodes it in a globally contrary way. In other words, the message is translated from the dominant code and reconstituted in an alternative frame of reference.

Essentially, this framework suggests that a given section of the audience shares, partly shares, or does not share, the dominant code in which the message has been transmitted (Morley 1974). In the context of cigarette advertising, Chapman (1986) suggests that a dominant reading would occur if we accepted associations made in an ad between cigarettes and luxury and glamour. As an example of a negotiated reading, Chapman discusses an ad for a women's cigarette brand using themes of nature and freshness, and a hypothetical male smoker who discards the feminine imagery but retains the fresh and natural associations. Finally, oppositional readings would be made by those who reject all cigarette ads as immoral and irresponsible.

Traces of Hall's framework are to be found elsewhere. For example, Gee (1986:142) notes social scientists' growing interest in they way people in different positions resist and negotiate the positions ascribed to them. He argues that the acquisition of particular literacy skills or practices may work in this way, serving as "a focus for transformation and challenge". Similarly, Fiske (1987) discusses how an apparently "subordinate" television audience may engage in "empowering play" with the medium. Drawing on Barthes's (1977) discussion of pleasure and play with texts, he argues that television audiences derive pleasure from creating and controlling the meanings of programmes. While such play in itself may not be subversive, Fiske argues that it enhances the audience member's sense of empowerment and self-esteem, making some form of resistance at least possible. Fiske also argues that the pleasures derived from viewing are a function of "socially situated viewers". Thus,

> For those in easy accommodation with the dominant ideology, this pleasure will be conforming and reactionary...for those whose accommodation to the system is less complete, an essential component of pleasure must be an evasion, or at least a negotiation, of dominant ideological practice, the ability to shake oneself free from its constraints (p249).

Morley (1974:1) agrees that decoding must be analysed at a level beyond psychological, individualist approaches. He argues that while there will always be individual readings of material,

> ...we need to see how the different sub-cultural structures and formations within the audience, and the sharing of different cultural codes and competencies amongst different groups and classes, determines the decoding of the message for different sections of the audience.

Morley (1980) suggests that cultural codes and competencies will be distributed differently between social classes, assisted by educational and family socialisation. However, he is wary of assuming that readings will be automatically determined or generated by social position. He argues that audiences are "clusters of socially situated individual readers", composed of various overlapping subgroups, in terms of class, region, age, gender, or ethnic origin. Each has its own history and cultural traditions, and these influence the ways in which messages are decoded. The position of audience members in the social structure sets parameters to their experiences, but does not determine them. As Dyer (1977, in Morley 1986:43) argues,

> ...one cannot conclude from a person's class, race, gender, sexual orientation and so on, how he or she will read a given text (though these factors do indicate what cultural code she or he has access to). It is also a question of how she or he thinks and feels about living her/his social situation.

The cultural studies perspective, then, reinforces the theme of active, socially situated advertising audiences, whose decoding of ads is grounded in and filtered through their own experiences and concerns. Furthermore, audiences do not necessarily decode ads as advertisers intend. Such asymmetries of meaning may not represent a lack of efficiency on the part of advertisers. They may simply be examples of "empowering" or "resistive" play with advertising texts by their audiences, who create and recast meaning to make sense of their environment in their own way.

7. CONCLUSIONS

This chapter has addressed the issue of advertising literacy and its implications from several perspectives. Various British advertising research practitioners suggest that consumers have a sophisticated understanding of advertising. The limited empirical research available on this topic supports this view. It indicates that advertising literacy involves a specialised vocabulary, an awareness of advertising objectives, styles, appeals and technical aspects, and an ability to use complex and subtle ad cues to make brand inferences. It also suggests that young adults are particularly sophisticated in their relations with advertising.

To complement this largely atheoretical material, the literature on literacy from a language and linguistics perspective has been consulted. It emphasises that literacy

is not simply a neutral set of skills to be assessed in isolation from its social and cultural context. Rather, it is a set of practices which are acquired, displayed and evaluated in different ways by different social groups. Bound up with these practices are issues of power and ideology.

While this offers a richer perspective on advertising literacy, the validity of the term "literacy" in this context cannot be assumed: it depends on advertising being considered a form of language or signifying system, with distinctive competencies required to understand it. Advertising was found to meet these criteria. It emerges as a rich and complex signifying system with very "leaky boundaries" between it and other communication forms, and whose meaning depends on the active participation of its audience. While many of the skills involved in understanding advertising are similar to those for film and other cultural forms, the way in which advertising harnesses editing, lighting, and other conventions for commercial purposes has to be understood. In this sense, then, advertising literacy calls for distinctive competencies, and the term appears valid.

Practitioners appear to address the implications of advertising literacy in terms of the degree of sophistication expected of consumers in interpreting ads. Applying language and linguistics theories of literacy, however, it seems that an analysis of advertising literacy must also address the way in which it is practiced in the everyday life of different social groups, and the uses which it serves for them. In this context, it appears that consumers may use advertising for a variety of purposes, not all of which relate to marketing transactions. Indeed, some uses of advertising may lead consumers to make resistive or oppositional readings of ads, as they negotiate ad meanings to address their own situation and concerns.

PART TWO:

METHODOLOGY AND PRELIMINARY RESEARCH

CHAPTER FIVE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter first assesses the contribution of prior research to an understanding of consumers' experience of advertising. It then explains how the research objectives for this study developed from the literature review, and presents details of a two-stage research programme. The first phase consisted of interviews with advertising research practitioners, and the main phase involved small group discussions and individual interviews with young adults. The chapter explains the focus on young adults, and the use of audience ethnography as the research approach. It describes the process of data collection, coding and analysis, and assesses the trustworthiness of the study, its limitations and contributions. Finally, it explains how chapters presenting the research findings are organised.

1. ASSESSMENT OF THE LITERATURE

Previous research suggests that there is scope for a study addressing consumers' advertising experiences in terms of attitudes, involvement and literacy. Firstly, we might ask whether consumers experience involvement on a number of different levels, just as they have attitudes to advertising in general, particular kinds of advertising, and individual ads. A second research extension would be to examine differences in attitudes and involvement between individuals or social groups. There also appears to be scope for more detailed examination of the nature and implications of advertising literacy. Finally, no previous research appears to have considered attitudes, involvement and literacy simultaneously. Such a study may indicate relationships between these three issues, offering a less fragmented perspective on consumers' advertising experiences.

In addition to suggesting avenues for research, the literature review raised several issues concerning the perspectives and methods adopted in previous studies. With the exception of advertising literacy studies, research has been dominated by academic, managerial, American, quantitative and positivist perspectives. The

constraints which these perspectives place on an understanding of consumers' advertising experiences are examined next.

1.1. Academic / practitioner perspectives

Attitudes to ads and advertising have been investigated by industry practitioners and academic researchers, while involvement research has been primarily conducted by academics. Advertising literacy, initially examined by practitioners, has recently begun to interest academics. Even within areas which have attracted the attention of academics and practitioners, however, there has been little interaction between the two. For example, in the case of attitudes to particular ads, practitioners have focused on Reaction Profiles, while academics have devoted their attention to attitude towards the ad (Aad). Where overlaps exist, these have tended to take the form of academics testing the validity of practitioners' "atheoretical" research instruments. In the case of literacy research, academics and practitioners also appear to have worked independently of each other.

The lack of integration between the two approaches may be explained by different priorities. Brindberg and Hirschman (1986) suggest that academic research tends to be concept-driven, with its strengths in the rigour brought to bear on measures and manipulations. However, this approach tends to sacrifice detailed analysis and comprehensive understanding of a phenomenon's features. Practitioner research, on the other hand, tends to be system-driven. It generally focuses on particular "real world" phenomena or systems, and its strength often lies in its pragmatic relevance and detailed descriptions. However, it tends to sacrifice precision and control of measures and manipulations. Brindberg and Hirschman argue that there is a need for both academic and practitioner orientations, so that the strengths of one may compensate for the weaknesses of the other. The literature review offered some support for this view, as the practitioners' Reaction Profiles, grounded in routine copy-testing procedures, provided a useful contrast to academics' theory-driven Aad research.

1.2. Managerial / non-managerial perspectives

Issues of involvement and attitudes to particular ads have been almost exclusively addressed from a managerial perspective. Much research on attitudes to advertising

in general, and on advertising literacy has also been conducted within a managerial framework.

Several researchers in the field of marketing and consumer behaviour have lamented such a restricted perspective. For example, Sheth (1980) and Holbrook (1985) have argued that if consumer behaviour is to be understood, theory must serve the purposes of the discipline as well as those of managers. Similarly, Anderson (1983) refers to marketing theory as a "technology of influence", used largely for the benefit of marketers rather than consumers or society at large. More recently, Hirschman (1993) conducted an "ideological analysis" of the 1980 and 1990 volumes of the Journal of Consumer Research. She reports that approximately one-third of articles were explicitly positioned as managerial aids, and argues that this places consumers "in an even more vulnerable position". It is not necessary, however, to consider marketers as Machiavellian manipulators, and consumers as their passive and defenceless prey, to agree with Anderson (1983:28) that marketing (or advertising)

> ...is a generic human activity, which may be studied simply because it is an intrinsically interesting social phenomenon...The interest must lie in understanding and explaining the phenomenon itself, rather than understanding it from the perspective of only one of the participants.

1.3. American / European perspectives

British researchers have examined consumers' advertising literacy and attitudes to advertising. However, most studies on the structure of beliefs about advertising, attitudes to particular ads, and involvement are American. Indeed, Buttle's (1990b) bibliometric analysis of American and European journals in the field of consumer and marketing research concludes that the literature "has an American accent": most articles written or cited in these journals were by authors with American affiliations.Buttle asks

> If "European" knowledge about consumer behaviour is no more than reconstituted American knowledge based upon American observation of American subjects, how reliable, valid and utilitarian is it in other contexts? (p 137)

Such concerns seem particularly relevant to this study. There is some evidence that American and British ads and attitudes to ads are different. Indeed, Carey (1992) argues that European and American communication models are based on different metaphors: American theory is dominated by a "transmission" perspective, concerned with issues of effectiveness and control. In contrast, European theory is

based on a "ritual" perspective, bound up with a sense of shared culture.

1.4. Quantitative / qualitative methods

Research on attitudes and involvement has been largely quantitative, with much of it in the form of laboratory experiments using students, simulated ads and hypothetical products. The ecological validity of such research has been challenged in previous chapters. Here, it is worth noting Wells's (1993) critique of "myths" surrounding consumer research, including assumptions that students represent consumers, laboratories represent the environment, and statistical significance confers real significance. Wells is not the first to criticise the quantitative, statistical focus of much consumer research. For example, Jacoby (1978:94) had asked

> ...what are we doing working three and four digits to the right of the decimal point? What kind of phenomena, measures, and data do we really have that we are being so precise in our statistical analysis?

In this context, Lull (1990:9-10) offers an undoubtedly partisan view of the culture of graduate programmes which may have extended to advertising research. Commenting on his experience as a graduate communications student in the 1970s, he observes that

> Learning to use statistics was the core ritual in the rites of passage for graduate students in communication studies. If you were clever with path analysis, and multi-discriminant analysis, you were a good student...The study of human communication was actually defined by our training in quantitative methods...

Consideration of such issues is not intended to undermine thoughtfully constructed quantitative research projects. It does, however, suggest the limitations which may be imposed on understanding when the study of human, social phenomena is dominated by a quantitative perspective.

Qualitative research seeks to explore and understand phenomena from the participants' perspective (Gordon and Langmaid 1988), rather than trying to test or measure these phenomena (Dickens 1987). This approach has been notable by its absence in research on attitudes and involvement, but has been used in the limited research on consumers' advertising literacy, contributing to a "thick description" (Geertz 1973) of the skills involved.

1.5. Positivist / nonpositivist paradigms

A paradigm refers to the accepted procedures and ways of thinking within a particular discipline (Boronski 1987). Thus, it embraces not only beliefs about the nature of reality and what can be known, but also ideas about how what is knowable should be investigated. Paradigms are deeply embedded in researchers' socialisation, telling them what is important and legitimate in their fields of study.

Basic to the positivist paradigm is a belief that the study of society and human behaviour should be "scientific" in the mould of the natural sciences. According to this perspective, social science research should identify uniformities in observable phenomena and establish the causal laws governing their occurrence. This will enable such phenomena to be explained, predicted and controlled. In order to achieve those goals, research methods based on objectivity and rigorous measurement are required.

In the field of marketing and consumer behaviour, several researchers have characterised the axioms of positivism and contrasted them with an "interpretive", "humanistic", or "naturalistic" paradigm, which is more concerned with understanding than with prediction or control. The Lincoln and Guba (1985) framework, presented in Table 5.1., has been widely discussed in this context. Although Hunt (1989, 1991) disagrees, there is a broad consensus that positivism, as characterised below, has been the dominant research paradigm (Anderson 1983; Deshpande 1983; Hirschman 1986; Ozanne and Hudson 1989; Lutz 1989; Sherry 1991). While there have been some calls for rapprochement or critical pluralism (Calder and Tybout 1987; Lutz 1989; Hunt 1991), many researchers believe that positivist and non-positivist paradigms are incommensurable: as Lincoln and Guba put it, the earth cannot be both round and flat. Hirschman (1986:239) argues that

> It is not that positivists and humanists believe each other's research to be without value; rather it is that each group places its faith in a different ideology for creating knowledge.

TABLE 5.1. POSITIVIST VERSUS NATURALISTIC AXIOMS

Axioms about	Positivist paradigm	Naturalistic paradigm
The nature of reality	Reality is single, tangible, fragmentable	Realities are multiple, constructed, holistic
The relationship of knower to the known	Knower and known are independent, a dualism	Knower and known are interactive, inseparable
The possibility of generalisation	Time- and context-free generalisations (nomothetic statements) are possible	Only time-and context-bound working hypotheses (idiographic statements) are possible
The possibility of causal linkages	There are real causes, temporally precedent to or simultaneous with their effects.	All entities are in a state of mutual simultaneous shaping, so that it is impossible to distinguish causes from effects.
The role of values	Inquiry is value-free	Inquiry is value-bound

Source: Y. Lincoln and E. Guba (1985) Naturalistic inquiry, Beverly Hills: Sage, p.37

The high stakes suggested by the sense of incommensurability may explain the "seemingly internecine struggle for control of the subject area" (Brown 1993), and the "nastiness and purposeful distortions" (Hirschman 1986) flowing between the two "research camps" (Sherry 1991). For example, Anderson (1989) and Holbrook et al (1989) have engaged in quite bitter and personalised exchanges with Calder and Tybout (1989).

Academic studies of attitudes and involvement with respect to advertising have been firmly located within the positivist research camp. Their emphasis on measurement and controlled experiments implies a belief in "objective" research and an interest in predicting advertising effects. For example, Wright (1973:53) argues that

> The advertising strategist will never be able to consistently predict the effect some communication input will have on the attitudinal outcome until identification of the potential set of mediators is undertaken (and empirically validated) and the situational weighting process empirically established.

Attitude and involvement studies have frequently presented isolated subjects with simulated ads in laboratory settings. This implies that reality is fragmentable, and that generalisations can be made beyond the research context. Buttle (1991:97) argues that this is unacceptable:

> Those researchers who investigate individual effects appear to conceive of individuals as islands of cognitive and affective responses, unconnected to a social world, detached from culture, removed from history and biography. This is an impoverished model of humanity which can produce only barren theory.

The complex interactions between ads, individuals and the social and cultural environment have begun to be addressed in interpretive analyses of advertising texts, and in limited qualitative research on consumers' advertising literacy and interpretations.

Overall, in positivist research on attitudes and involvement it seems that consumer voices have been heard, but only in the language and script of the researchers. In the emergent interpretive research tradition, consumers have often been spoken for rather than allowed to speak themselves. As Mick and Buhl (1992:317) observe, there is a lack of "actual consumer data" in studies of consumers' meanings. Therefore, they argue,

> To advance theory and research we must look at advertising more thoroughly through the consumer's eyes.

2. PRELIMINARY RESEARCH: OBJECTIVES AND DESIGN

Given the American, quantitative focus of much of the research on attitudes and involvement, and the limited amount of research on advertising literacy, the first phase of the research was designed to explore these issues in a British context. Interviews were conducted with advertising research practitioners based in Scotland. The location was selected largely for practical reasons, as this researcher lived and worked in Edinburgh. However, it did afford access to a range of companies involved in advertising research. Furthermore, given concerns about the feasibility of generalising from one cultural context to another it was thought that a comparison of Scottish experiences with those from America or other British regions would be useful. The practitioners were used as key informants or "elite" respondents. Marshall and Rossman (1989) describe "elites" as influential, prominent, and well-informed people in an organisation or community, who are selected for interview on the basis of their expertise in areas relevant to the research. These practitioners regularly commissioned, conducted or read research on consumers' receptiveness to potential advertising themes, campaigns, or individual ads. From their accumulated research experience with a wide range of consumers, it was

thought that they could offer useful views and insights concerning consumers' advertising experiences.

This phase of the research was therefore intended to explore practitioners' perceptions of consumers' attitudes, involvement and literacy with respect to advertising. Such perceptions essentially offered second-hand accounts of consumer experiences, filtered through practitioners' professional interest in the "technology of influence" (Anderson 1983). In comparing the practitioners' perceptions with themes identified in the literature review, and subsequently with consumer accounts, it was hoped that a richer account of consumers' experience could be offered. The benefits of triangulation - bringing different data sources to bear on a single point - have long been appreciated (Jick 1979). As Marshall and Rossman (1989) observe, data from different sources can be used to corroborate, elaborate or illuminate research evidence and questions. The practitioner interviews had two further objectives. Firstly, they were intended to sensitise the researcher to the Scottish context, as her previous research experience was with Irish and English consumers. Secondly, it was hoped to draw on the practitioners' experience of various research approaches in designing the second phase of this project.

Given the exploratory purpose of this research, and the desire to understand how practitioners "define the situation" (Thomas 1949, in Marshall and Rossman 1989:46), a qualitative approach was taken. Dickens (1987) observes that qualitative methods, such as unstructured or semi-structured interviews, are response- rather than question-oriented. Thus, the flow of an interview is at least partly determined by respondents; it is not dictated by the format of a questionnaire. Similarly, Walker (1985) notes that qualitative methods are flexible and opportunistic, obtaining a great deal of rich data from a limited number of individuals. These characteristics have led to much debate about the validity, reliability and general "trusthworthiness" of qualitative methods, and such issues are examined when assessing this research project as a whole.

Nine semi-structured interviews were conducted with advertising research practitioners between April and July 1989. Reflecting the flexibility of the approach, one of the interviews was with two practitioners, when a participant suggested that his colleague join the discussion. The sample was not designed to be completely representative of the Scottish advertising research industry, but to obtain a balance of similarities and differences (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Lincoln and Guba 1985). Thus, half of the practitioners worked in advertising agencies, and the others

worked in marketing research companies. Three were identified through the Market Research Society Yearbook, and four more were recruited by a "snowballing" process. This sample included the largest Scottish-based research companies and advertising agencies. It also included practitioners who had recently moved up to Scotland from London. To provide further contrast within the sample, and to balance the potential consensus of views arising from the snowballing procedure, two further participants were obtained by consulting a directory of advertising agencies in Scotland. One interview was with a planner who assisted the Scottish branch of a London-based agency when necessary, and the other was with a researcher who acted as a planning consultant for a smaller Scottish advertising agency. A list of the participating companies is provided in Appendix A.

Most of the interviews took place in the practitioners' offices, and in Edinburgh. In one case, someone based outside Edinburgh suggested meeting in the researcher's office, and in another case, the interview was conducted in Glasgow. This limited geographic spread should be assessed in relation to the concentration of the Scottish advertising and research industry. Indeed, while most of the practitoners interviewed were based in Edinburgh, they frequently worked on research projects throughout Scotland.

According to Marshall and Rossman (1989), researchers conducting in-depth interviews typically have a few general topics, or "grand tour" questions (Spradley 1979), and respect the way in which participants frame and structure their responses. Indeed,

> Elites respond well to inquiries related to broad areas of content and to a high proportion of intelligent, provocative, open-ended questions that allow them the freedom to use their knowledge and imagination (Marshall and Rossman 1989 : 94).

In this case, the researcher explained that she was conducting academic research on consumers' response to advertising, and was unfamiliar with the Scottish advertising research industry. It was hoped that this "outsider" position would allow "naive" questions to be asked, and encourage practitioners to expand on their views and experience. They were asked about their own backgrounds, career paths and use of various advertising research methods. Their perceptions of consumers' attitudes, involvement, and sophistication with respect to advertising were also discussed at some length. Non-directive probes and follow-up questions were used in order to clarify or expand upon issues. Examples were also sought whenever possible, with assurances that the details would remain confidential.

The interviews ranged from 45 minutes to two hours. They were taped and partially transcribed, resulting in approximately 100 pages of transcript. Ideally, the Glaser and Strauss (1967) approach of joint collection, coding and analysis of data would have been followed strictly. Due to time constraints, transcribing and detailed analysis took place once the interviews were completed. Between interviews, however, the researcher listened to the tapes, noted themes and ideas, and fed these into subsequent interviews. Following Lincoln and Guba's (1985) call for "member checks", a summary analysis was prepared and sent to the practitioners for comment. No adverse comments were received: indeed, it was later learned that someone used the report as part of an orientation programme for a new colleague.

3. THE MAIN RESEARCH PROGRAMME

For the second stage of this study, individual and small-group discussions were conducted with young adults. The following sections describe the objectives, procedures and rationale of the programme.

3.1. Objectives

Based on the literature review and interviews with practitoners, the objectives of the second stage of the research were refined. The general aim of the project was still to examine consumers' experiences of advertising, focusing on their attitudes, involvement and literacy. As many previous studies (including the preliminary research reported above) had either spoken for consumers or allowed them to speak from a limited script, this stage of the research was intended to "put consumer experience back into consumer research" (Thompson et al 1989). It sought to obtain Scottish consumers' own accounts of the dimensions, range and patterns of their everyday advertising experiences.

The objectives of this project were also shaped by the lack of attention in much attitude and involvement research to differences between social groups, and the warnings of the practitioners interviewed earlier about the dangers of generalisation. Indeed, King (1975:338) has argued that

> What we need...is not a wholly comprehensive theory of advertising, but a slightly more advanced theory of advertisements. A framework for thinking how different sorts of advertisements might work, for different people, in different media, in different circumstances, at different stages of time.

It was therefore decided to focus on young adults rather than a wide range of consumers. Firstly, it was thought that they would offer the greatest opportunity for exploring advertising literacy: the literature suggests that young adults have a particularly sophisticated understanding of advertising (Gordon 1984; Lannon 1985; Nava and Nava 1990). This view was supported by the practitioners interviewed, and by various market research organisations. For example, according to Mintel (1988:8)

> Music, visual image and style are now integral to the way in which young adults perceive the world and communicate with others. As a generation raised on television, young adults are film and image literate to an extent and in a way that previous generations have not been.

Secondly, young adults currently constitute a lucrative but shrinking market segment for a range of products and services (Mintel 1990), as indicated by the extensive research conducted on their lifestyles, values and purchasing behaviour (eg Mintel 1988, 1990; Euromonitor 1990; Benady 1993a,b; Hatfield 1993). Thus, the relationship between young adults and advertising could be particularly interesting. It could also have implications for the future. Davis (1990) points out that cultural changes originating among the young have gradually found their way into mainstream adult culture. In this sense, young adults' advertising literacy may permeate older generations' experience of advertising. Furthermore, as young adults themselves grow older, they will become the mainstream advertising audience.

Finally, adolescence and youth is considered a turbulent time for personal development and social relationships. According to Willis (1990:7),

> The teenage and early adult years are important from a cultural perspective and in special need of a close "qualitative" attention because it is here, at least in first-world Western cultures, where people are formed most self-consciously through their own symbolic and other activities.

Thus, an enhanced understanding of the ways young adults made sense of and integrate advertising into their everyday lives could contribute to this area of enquiry, especially as advertising frequently deals in images of self-identity and social relationships (Williamson 1978; Schudson 1984; Leiss et al 1990; Goldman 1992).

Many studies of "young people" or "young adults" have used 24 as the upper age limit (Gordon 1982, 1984; Mintel 1988, 1990; Euromonitor 1990). However, the

lower age limit has ranged from 12 (Furnham and Gunter 1989) to 18 (Gordon 1982). In this study, "young adults" were defined as those aged 18-24. Researchers such as Aitken et al (1985, 1988a, b) have shown that children aged 16 or younger have a sophisticated understanding of ads. In this case, however, it was thought that including 16 year-olds may dilute the focus of the study. As many 16 year-olds would still be at school, their everyday lives and social influences may be very different from those aged 18-24. Secondly, much alcohol advertising is aimed at 18-24 year-olds, and might be an important element of young adult's advertising experiences. The response of those below the legal drinking age is undoubtedly important, and has been addressed elsewhere (eg Aitken et al 1988a, b).

3.2. Selection of comparison groups

As Mintel (1988) emphasises, "the young" are not a homogeneous group; for example, they may be members of different subcultures. However, subcultures are not necessarily well-defined, and for many young people, their membership is marginal and transitory (Kitwood 1980; Davis 1990).

This study did not treat 18-24 year-olds as a homogeneous group, or their subcultural affiliations as unimportant. Those affiliations, together with other aspects of young adults' lifestyles, values, social relationships and media habits, were expected to shape their experiences of advertising. However, such complex and inter-related differences were not used as the basis for sampling in this study. Instead, young adults were recruited on the basis of age, gender and occupational status. This is not to say that these characteristics were expected to determine the young adults' advertising experiences: as Dyer (1977, in Morley 1986:43) has argued, it is not just our social situation which influences our reading of particular texts, but also how we feel about our lives.

Turning first to age considerations, the study was intended to allow comparison between the 18-20 year-olds in the sample and those aged 21 or over. Given the narrow age-band, it could be argued that age would hardly shape their experience of advertising. However, these years are often a time of transition on many fronts (James 1990). This, together with the rapid pace of change in Western societies, suggested that there may be greater differences in advertising experiences between the two groups than the small age-gap might lead us to expect.

Turning to gender comparisons, several studies indicate that men and women

experience advertising in different ways. For example, Krugman (1966-67) found that women elaborated more on ads than men. More recently, Meyers-Levy and Sternthal (1991) found women to have a lower threshhold for elaborative processing of message cues than men. The authors refer to other studies suggesting that women offer more detailed, associative, and imagery-laced interpretations and descriptions of non-verbal stimuli. Seeking to account for gender differences, Meyers-Levy (1988) refers to the psychological orientations of agency and communion. According to Bakan (1966, in Meyers-Levy 1988:522), men tend to assume an agency orientation, adopting an assertive, self-focused and achievement-oriented perspective. In contrast, women tend to assume a communion orientation, emphasising affiliation and attachment with others. Such orientations may influence information-processing styles: Meyers-Levy (1989:221) suggests that

> ...males' characteristic mode of processing is distinguished by greater use of efficiency-striving heuristics, while that of females is marked by more pronounced attempts towards maximizing the comprehensiveness of processing.

Reviewing research in the field of literary criticism, Stern (1993:561) discusses several studies on male and female reading styles, which would be consistent with a view of women as elaborating more on advertising messages:

> ...men tended to read for authorial intent, were motivated to acquire information from a story, were less likely to draw inferences, and were more likely to make evaluative judgements. Women...tended not to search for authorial intent, were motivated to experience a story's personal relationships rather than to get its "point", were more likely to draw inferences, and were more likely to empathize than to judge...

While selecting a sample on the basis of age and gender poses few problems, the issue of social status is more difficult, particularly in the case of young adults. Social class is often measured according to the occupation of "head of household", who is unlikely to be aged 18-24. This approach may well reflect young adults' income, consumption and educational opportunities. However, it seems inappropriate for a study designed to examine the experiences of young adults in their own right to define them according to the social standing of others.

Using their own occupation as a guide to their social class would also pose problems. In the first place, young adults are more likely than others to be students, and thus, as Francis (1982) points out, not yet located within an occupational structure. Furthermore, the ten-year period between the ages of 16 and 25 is a very mobile one in both social and occupational terms. Thus, in his study of young members of the London Central YMCA, Francis collapsed the Office of Population,

Censuses and Surveys (1970) five-point occupational scale into two points, and applied it only to those in employment. He then compared students and workers, and working and unemployed respondents. In this study, it was decided to take a broadly similar approach, by comparing the experiences of young adults who were students, working and unemployed. Rather than using a collapsed occupational scale for those who were working, however, older workers were categorised as graduates or non-graduates.

There were several reasons for thinking that these categories could be related to contrasting experiences of advertising. Firstly, differences in income may shape young adults' relationship with advertising. While some students or unemployed people may be subsidised by their families, those who are working would generally have significantly greater spending power. Thus, they may approach advertising, and be addressed by it, as potential consumers of many goods and services. The other groups would be able to afford a more restricted range and amount of goods and services, and thus may feel more detached or excluded from the world of marketing transactions. They may not consider themselves in the market for certain advertised goods or services, and thus may perceive advertising as less useful, relevant, or interesting. This may be compounded by advertisers' relative lack of interest in them, so that the imagery and ideas in ads, as well as the products, may seem less relevant to their lives.

While students may suffer some of the financial constraints experienced by young unemployed adults, their positions may be very different in other respects. Students may find it easier than their unemployed counterparts to accept their current lack of spending power. While graduate employment opportunities have been eroded in recent years, students may still consider their current financial constraints as temporary, with compensations of lifestyle, intellectual development, and better prospects of employment (and consumption) in the near future. Thus, while they may be currently excluded from many marketing transactions, their relationship with advertising may be shaped as much by their expectations as by their current situation.

The differences between students and other segments of the population have been the object of some interest in the marketing literature, as many research projects have been based on student samples (Morgan 1979). While these may be cheap and convenient, various studies have indicated that students are not representative of other populations (Vinson and Lundstrom 1979; Soley and Reid 1983). Indeed,

Pollay and Mittal (1993) report different belief structures concerning advertising between student and consumer panel respondents. It may be that some of the differences identified in the literature are simply attributable to age. However, Sears (1986) points to other distinctive attributes of students, such as their upper educational background, superior cognitive skills, less crystalised attitudes and their greater egocentricity and need for peer approval.

Turning to comparisons between workers, it is the question of future expectations rather than current income which motivates a comparison between graduates and non-graduates. Graduate workers will not always earn more than non-graduates; indeed, many graduates aged 21-24 will be on relatively low salaries as they complete professional training and qualifications. However, their career expectations and aspirations may be higher than their non-graduate counterparts, and this may shape their advertising experiences. There may be some similarities between working graduates and students in their advertising experiences. In addition to their analytical training, which may lead to a more critical or detached approach, both groups may see themselves as attractive future prospects to advertisers.

Finally, young unemployed adults' experiences of advertising may be distinctive in several respects. As we have seen, the Advertising Association (1992:18) compared approval levels between unemployed and other respondents, and concluded that there was no evidence to support comments that "the unemployed must find advertising particularly annoying". Others offer a less complacent or optimistic perspective on this issue, however. Grafton-Small (1987) argues that consumption is essentially about power, so that the less powerful are those with less access to or use of goods and their possibilities. He suggests that the exclusion of poorer members of society occurs at a symbolic as well as material level. Developing this argument, Grafton Small (1993a) cites the example of Pruitt-Igoe, a vast American housing project built in the 1950s for people living on state benefits. Apparently, its only envisaged function was to house them, as it was built without any shops, sports, or social facilities. This "monumental belittlement" was rejected by its intended occupants, and demolished less than twenty years later. This, according to Grafton Small (1993a:94) signalled the return of its inhabitants

> ...to what they would see as their proper place in the symbolic order of the local community, that is, the one which acknowledged their right to belong and which did not seek to exclude them entirely from the goods and services that even they had come to expect.

If poor or unemployed members of society are indeed excluded or alientated at a

symbolic as well as material level, we might expect advertising to be implicated. As Ignatieff (1989) argues,

> The ads invite them to holiday in Marbella, to drive their Audi through the mountains, to fax their latest contract to the New York office...Mass culture talks the language of social inclusion: everyone is a consumer, everyone drinks Coke, everyone can afford Levi's jeans....The poor are there all right, at the dark edge of the shoplight's shadow.

The extent to which such issues are reflected in the experience of advertising among young adults who are unemployed deserves attention.

3.3. Research approach

Lutz (1989) argues that since all research is influenced by paradigmatic assumptions, it is useful to make these explicit. This research was grounded in a non-positivist paradigm, in that it assumed young adults' experiences of advertising to be socially constructed and bound up with their everyday lives. Furthermore, it set out to understand and describe these experiences, rather than to measure them or predict how young adults may react to particular ads. Given these assumptions and objectives, a qualitative approach was again selected. As Lincoln and Guba (1985) and Cooper (1989) observe, qualitative methods are not only appropriate to or used in non-positivist research. They are, however, particularly valuable in projects directed towards "experiencing the experience of others" (Burns 1989:51).

In commercial marketing research, qualitative research usually takes the form of the group discussion or, to a lesser extent, the individual "depth" interview (Robson and Foster 1989). Among academic consumer and marketing researchers, however, a wider range of qualitative methods and approaches have recently been considered. Adopting the role of "participant observer", Sherry (1991) charts the diffusion of "alternative" methods in the American consumer research community. He refers to the recent influx of research from disciplines such as anthropology and sociology,yielding

> ...a diversity of perspectives and methods too complex to permit grouping into anything other than a historically grounded common category (p 568).

Indeed, this may explain why Hirschman and Holbrook's (1992) ambitious attempt at an integrated classification of "postmodern consumer research" philosophies and techniques proved disappointing (Grafton Small 1993b).

Given this study's emphasis on the social context of advertising experiences,

participant observation seemed to be a particularly relevant approach: after all, it was participant observation which stimulated the study in the first place. However, as a formal research method, it is most suited to situations where there is a constant supply of the activities to be examined, including interactions between people playing particular roles. Sites such as shops, schools and hospitals are dedicated to particular activities and offer a range of formal and informal interactions to be observed, such as those between staff and customers or teachers and students. Theoretical or purposive sampling (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Lincoln and Guba 1985) of sites, individuals and events is possible, as the researcher can dip into a constant flow of activities and interactions. Participant observation of 18-24 year-olds' experiences of advertising posed problems, however. Such experiences are not necessarily public, and they are widely dispersed. They may occur while watching commercial television programmes, but advertising is also encountered in many other media, on many occasions, and in many contexts. Furthermore, ads are not necessarily experienced only at the point of reception.

Similar problems have been encountered in the fields of cultural and media studies. Much research in these areas has addressed the ways in which mass media messages are consumed, interpreted, and integrated into people's everyday lives. At the same time, researchers have faced the elusiveness of media audiences. Ang (1991) distinguishes between the construct of "the television audience" and the social world of "actual audiences", with its

> ...infinite, contradictory, dispersed and dynamic practices and experiences of television audiencehood enacted by people in their everyday lives (p 13).

Similarly, Moores (1993) notes the lack of a stable entity which can be isolated and observed as the media audience. Nonetheless, he describes the "ethnographic turn" in media audience research since the late 1970s. Ethnographic research is rooted in anthropology, and traditionally refers to

> a written account of a lengthy social interaction between a scholar and a distant culture...an effort to observe and to comprehend the entire tapestry of social life (Radway 1988:367).

Morley's (1980) research on the "Nationwide" audience was the first to take an ethnographic approach to audiences in the field of cultural studies. He showed a video of that current affairs programme to different groups, and asked for their responses. All participants were part-time or full-time students, but came from a range of occupational and ethnic backgrounds. While this study is generally accepted as a landmark in audience research, there has been much discussion of its

shortcomings, not least by its author (Morley 1986). Turner (1990) finds the analysis of the discussions limited, and argues that the study was hardly ethnographic:

> [Morley] arbitrarily selected groups of people he then called an "audience" for the purpose of his study; he collected them in a group that would otherwise not have been formed, in a place they would otherwise not have occupied, and asked them to become the audience of a program they may otherwise not have chosen to watch (p 164).

Subsequent audience studies have broadened the scope of enquiry beyond interpretations of particular television episodes to patterns of media usage and preference. For example, Hobson (1982) examined the female audience for "Crossroads", a television soap opera. She went to women's homes, and watched the programme with them as a springboard for discussion:

> I wanted viewers to determine what was interesting or what they noticed, or liked, or disliked, about the programme and specifically about the episodes which we had watched.

Watching the programme with the women also showed Hobson the context in which it was viewed: many women juggled their viewing with preparing the evening meal or feeding children. Jenkins (1992) approached his study of media fan subcultures with a decade of active personal involvement. His account is based on personal experience, interviews, informal conversations, and the analysis of materials such as fan newsletters, corespondence and video art. Lull's (1990) account of family television viewing is based on participant observation in many homes and in-depth interviews with each family member. Morley (1986) also visited families in their own homes, but his research on television viewing patterns was restricted to one and a half hour interviews. Other research on soap opera audiences has been restricted to discussions with children in schools and youth clubs (Buckingham 1987), or even the analysis of solicited letters concerning people's likes and dislikes (Ang 1985).

As Turner (1990) observes, the use of the term "ethnography" in relation to some of these studies is contentious. Nightingale (1989) argues that even when audience research techniques are ethnographic, the research strategies frequently are not. Many studies do not set out to gain a broad understanding of a culture, but to address narrow issues such as the decoding of a text (Morley 1980), its popularity (Hobson 1982) or the pleasures which it provides (Ang 1985; Buckingham 1987). The "narrowly circumscribed" goals of audience research have also been criticised by Radway (1988:366) for isolating a single medium and neglecting

> ...the endlessly shifting, ever-evolving kaleidoscope of daily life and the way which the media are integrated and implicated within it.

Nightingale laments the limited engagement of researchers with their subjects, wondering whether one and a half-hour interviews are sufficient for a detailed or "thick description". She also rejects accounts which are simply descriptive. In this, she is supported by advocates of "structural" or "critical" ethnographies (eg Hollands 1985; Moores 1993), which

> ...explain significances and practices by locating them in relation to structures of power and inequality (Moores 1993:5).

Defending the audience ethnography tradition, Moores (1993:4) argues that many such studies

> ...share some of the same general intentions as anthropological research. There may be a similar concern, for instance, with questions of meaning and social contexts - and with charting the "situational embeddedness" of cultural practices...

Similarly, McRobbie (1984, in Turner 1990:118) argues that participant observation in cultural studies of young people restricts research to public acts. This neglects many of their experiences as audience members, and

> To ignore these is to miss an absolutely central strand in their social and personal experience...we are left with little knowledge of any one of their reading or viewing experiences, and therefore with how they find themselves represented in these texts, and with how in turn they appropriate from some of these and discard others.

While this study did not draw on the full range of ethnographic techniques, its aims were thought to be sufficiently broad to merit describing it in ethnographic terms. Following Harre and Secord (1972:7) it was thought that

> The things that people say about themselves and other people should be taken seriously...It is through reports of feelings, plans, intentions, beliefs, reasons and so on that the meanings of social behaviour and the rules underlying social acts can be discovered.

In keeping with the ethnographic tradition, the young adults were treated as "informants" rather than "respondents". As Spradley (1979:57) observes, many researchers confuse these two because they both answer questions and provide information about their culture. However,

> Survey research with respondents almost always employs the language of the social scientist. The questions arise out of the social scientist's culture. Ethnographic research, on the other hand, depends more fully on the language of the informant. The questions arise out of the informant's culture.

3.4. Data collection methods

This study used a mixture of small group discussions and individual interviews. Group discussions, or "focus groups", offer a relatively quick, flexible and inexpensive method of qualitative data collection. Like in-depth interviewing, group discussions focus on the informant's perspective, and are not restricted by a rigid framework of questions or response categories. In group discussions, however, there is not simply interaction between informants and the researcher/moderator, but between informants themselves. This may lead to greater stimulation or elaboration of ideas, and is particularly appropriate when researching topics where social influence may be important. For example, Morley (1980) used group discussions to examine how interpretations of the "Nationwide" programme were collectively constructed. According to Morgan (1988:12),

> The hallmark of focus groups is the explicit use of the group interaction to produce data and insights that would be less accessible without the interaction found in a group.

Standard group discussions involve eight or more participants. For this study, it was thought that these might not be particularly useful. They may generate a great deal of discussion, but it would be difficult to pursue individual ideas or comments in detail without boring or alientating the others in the group. Robson (1989) recommends the use of smaller groups (of approximately four people) when there is a need to explore individual behaviour in more detail, without losing the benefits of interaction. She also suggests that small groups are useful if children or young teenagers are being interviewed. Gordon and Langmaid (1988) also consider small groups appropriate for adolescents, for whom a large group of peers encourages "posturing" and showing-off. While the same may not be true of 18-24 year-olds, the practitioners interviewed earlier commented that this age-group tended to be reticent, self-conscious and vulnerable to peer pressure. Small groups, then, were thought to offer the benefits of interaction in an environment where there was less pressure to impress or conform, and the opportunity to explore individual comments in some depth.

In addition to issues of validity and reliability, group discussions pose particular problems of informant and moderator bias (Tynan and Drayton 1988). The moderator has to be sensitive to group dynamics, and ensure that discussion or interpretation is not dominated by particular individuals. The question of group dynamics seemed particularly relevant to this study: Robson and Burns (1989) claim

that views on aesthetics and design can "spread like contagion" through a group discussion. Therefore, the small group discussions were complemented by individual interviews. Individual interviews tend to be more expensive and time-consuming, and are used primarily for socially and personally sensitive topics, complex decision-making processes, and the enrichment of other research techniques. They avoid problems of peer group pressures, and allow individual tastes and idiosyncrasies to be explored. McQuarrie and McIntyre (1988) sugggest that while focus groups may be best for researching common ideas, or those held by segments of the population, individual interviews are useful for eliciting idiosyncratic ideas. Indeed, Burns (1989:49) notes,

> The phenomenon of private consumption of public stimulus has received very little attention but it is clear that private messages can be taken from television advertising. These private responses are often not played back into the conventional group discussion format for they are usually of very intimate nature and are often symbolic.

The combination of individual interviews and small group discussions constituted within-method triangulation (Denzin 1988), whereby multiple techniques within a given method are used to examine a given phenomenon. In this study, the small groups were used to generate a range of ideas and explore them in the context of peer-group interaction. The individual interviews were used to examine the issues emerging from the groups in more detail, and in the absense of peer pressure. As the research also used "multiple comparison groups" (Glaser and Strauss 1967), it benefitted from data triangulation (Denzin 1988).

Decisions on the number of groups and individual interviews to conduct should be guided by the research objectives and the nature of the sample (Gordon and Langmaid 1988; Morgan 1988). For example, a simple exploratory study among a homogeneous group of people may only require three or four groups discussions. In contrast, a more detailed examination of phenomena among a heterogeneous sample would call for more extensive sampling. Gordon and Langmaid (1988) suggest building a sampling plan from the various subgroups forming the population of interest. In this case, the research was intended to compare experiences between young adults according to their age, gender and occupational status. On this basis, it was decided to conduct fourteen small group discussions and a similar number of individual interviews, as presented in Table 5.2. With four people to a group, this would provide a total sample size of 70, with equal numbers of men and women. It would yield 20 students, 30 workers (including 12 graduates) and 20 who were unemployed. In terms of age, 30 informants would be 18-20, and 40 would be 21-24:

this imbalance was dictated by the splitting of the older working category into graduates and non-graduates.

TABLE 5.2. SAMPLING PLAN FOR GROUPS AND INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWS

Male		**Female**	
18-20	21-24	18-20	21-24
Student	Student	Student	Student
Working	Non-graduate working	Working	Non-graduate working
Unemployed	Graduate working	Unemployed	Graduate working
	Unemployed		Unemployed

3.5. Pilot study

A pilot study involved four small group discussions and two individual interviews, conducted in November and December 1990. This phase was funded by a small grant from the Faculty of Social Sciences and examined the feasibility of the general approach.

This phase of the research was valuable in several ways. It gave the researcher experience in setting up the groups and interviews, and facilitated the trial of various procedures. It also sensitised her to the young adults' language. For example, she initially used the term "ad", but realised that they generally referred to them as "adverts". The pilot study was also useful in very practical ways. Half of one group discussion was lost when the tape recorder was not switched on properly, resulting in particular care being taken in subsequent handling of the equipment. It also became clear that these tapes were much more time-consuming to transcribe than the practitioner interviews, so that the budget for the main phase included provision for sub-contracting that activity.

Overall, the pilot study indicated that the proposed approach to the groups and individual interviews would work in the main phase of the research, and provide data relevant to the study's objectives. The main problem encountered in the pilot

study related to recruitment. Initially, a "snowballing" procedure was considered, and this is how young adults for the pilot study were recruited. For example, a friend of the researcher was a warden in a student house, others worked in offices with 18-24 year-olds, and some (non-marketing) colleagues had sons and daughters in that age-group. As this network had easiest access to students and workers, it was decided to focus on these groups for the pilot study, as this would still allow the general approach to be tested.

This snowballing method of recruitment proved extremely time-consuming and unreliable. In addition to specifying age, gender and occupational categories, the researcher emphasised that all recruits should be Scottish, none should have studied Art or Business Studies, and that if more than one informant was obtained through the same recruiter, they should not know each other. This was not always achieved, however. A group of male students was recruited, but only one came along to the discussion. He did not want to be interviewed alone, so he telephoned his flatmate and asked him to join in. On another occasion, what was meant to be a group of four graduate workers actually consisted of six people, only two of whom were graduates, and one of these was originally from Northern Ireland. The other four were acquainted, and one had a HND Business Studies qualification. Given these problems of time and control, it was decided to use another recruitment method for the main phase of the research.

Other changes to the research arising from the pilot study were relatively minor, and will be explained when the procedures of the main phase are discussed. As the procedures used in the pilot study (apart from recruitment) were similar to those in the main phase, and as they yielded useful material, data from this stage were combined with those from the later fieldwork for the purposes of analysis.

3.6. Fieldwork

The main phase of the research, funded by a grant from the Nuffield Foundation, was conducted in Edinburgh between May and October 1991. The grant enabled the services of a professional recruiter to be used, and an incentive of £10 to be paid to participants. It was recognised that using a professional recruiter was not without disadvantages. Robson and Burns (1989) mention problems such as recruiters' reliance on over-researched areas or "professional attenders" at group discussions. It was thought that such problems were less likely with this study, however:

commercial research studies frequently draw their samples from older people, and would be relatively uninterested in those who were students or unemployed. Nonetheless, several precautions were taken. The recruiter was affiliated with the Market Research Society, and selected on the basis of personal recommendation from another academic researcher. She was thoroughly briefed about the aims of the project and on the need for rigorous sample selection in view of the academic nature of the study. In particular, it was emphasised that informants should not have academic, family or working backgrounds relating to art, marketing, or media, as this may confound an examination of advertising literacy. In order to enable informants to draw on some common "referent systems" (Leiss et al 1990), it was also stresed that informants should be Scottish and have lived in Scotland for the last five years. Details of the young adult sample are provided in Appendix C.

This recruitment method proved more reliable than the "snowballing" procedure. Unfortunately budget restrictions did not allow oversampling to take place, so that some groups took place with less than four participants; a total of 65 young adults took part in this phase of the research. During the groups and individual interviews, checks were made on how informants were recruited and whether they had taken part in any previous research. Obviously, "professional attenders" may be experts in dissimulation, but no irregularities were detected. Furthermore, it was reassuring to note that the professionally recruited informants behaved in very similar ways to those obtained through the pilot study's "snowballing" method, and that the data obtained from both sets were consistent.

Four informants were however discovered to have had some limited marketing-related experience. Someone in an unemployed group had a further education qualification in Media Studies, and had worked as a local radio researcher. His consideration prevented problems arising, however: he had been difficult to draw into conversation during the group, and explained afterwards that this had been a conscious decision. The other cases were examined carefully before it was decided not to discard them, and these informants' contributions are compared with those of others when the issue of advertising literacy is examined. Indeed, after the event, these cases were found to offer a useful point of contrast with others. Two individual interviews were discarded and informants replaced, however. In one case, the informant was found to have learning difficulties, and in the other a "student" had been unemployed for some time, having spent a year abroad following a Psychology and Management degree!

All group discussions were completed prior to the individual interviews. It was thought that this would enable maximum use to be made of the individual interviews, allowing the full range of themes and issues emerging from the groups to be examined in greater detail. Although the availability of students was constrained by examinations and term times, an effort was made to use the comparison groups in the sample constructively. Thus, an effort was made to vary the sequence of groups and individual interviews, for example by following a young female unemployed group with a older group of male graduate workers.

Turning to issues of location, non-positivist research stresses the importance of natural settings. As discussed earlier, there was no one site which could be identified as the natural context for this research. Advertising encounters and experiences are not restricted to particular locations. Even if the research were conducted in informants' homes, this would only be a partially relevant setting. Furthermore, group discussions could not take place in the homes of everyone participating.

Following Gordon and Langmaid (1988), locations were sought which would help informants feel comfortable. Students were interviewed in a Students' Union room. Some workers (usually graduates) were interviewed in a room of the University's Staff Club (these had also been the locations for the pilot study). Most workers and all unemployed informants were interviewed in the recruiter's home however. In each case, comfortable chairs were arranged around a coffee table.

3.7. Procedures

The taped discussion usually lasted between an hour and a half and two hours: the longest and the shortest were both individual interviews.

Informants were welcomed as they arrived, paid, and given refreshments. Permission was sought to tape-record the session, and anonymity was assured.

The study was explained in very general terms as being concerned with what young adults did in their leisure time (this matched the recruiter's description of the study). The approach was semi-structured, and the researcher tried to address issues by pursuing particular comments rather than introducing topics which the young adults had not mentioned themselves. Thus, there was considerable variation in the sequence and balance of discussion in the sessions. The individual interviews followed a similar path to the group discussions. Again, informants set the course of

the discussion as far as possible, but as all interaction was between the researcher and informant, discussion was more directed than in the groups.

In the groups, informants were asked to introduce themselves, and to explain what they liked to do in their spare time. Once everyone had spoken individually, the group as a whole was asked about patterns of media use and preference. This was useful in indicating potential exposure to advertising, and encouraged informants to talk to each other. This helped the group to "form": as Foster (1989) observes, group members initially look for things they have in common and chat fairly superficially.

In many cases, the topic of advertising emerged naturally from discussion of media habits and preferences. Where this did not happen, it was introduced by asking what informants tended to do on arriving at the cinema or during commercial breaks on television. The researcher then explained that she was interested in what they thought of advertising and what they liked and disliked about ads on television, billboards, in the cinema, or in magazines and newspapers. She emphasised that she was interested in advertising as part of everyday life, and was not working for an advertising agency or a particular company.

Informants were then asked to talk about any ads (or "adverts") which came to mind for any reason. An alternative approach would have been to select a range of ads and use these consistently throughout the research. That seemed inconsistent with the goals of this study, however; it would impose ads on the group, just as Morley (1980) imposed a television programme on people who might not otherwise have seen it. It seemed much more appropriate to ground discussion of advertising in ads which informants had themselves encountered. Furthermore, informants' descriptions of ads may be considered as "stories" (Levy 1981; Durgee 1988), which may indicate as much about the tellers' perspective as about the actual ad. Finally, as the following chapters demonstrate, this approach was not divorced from informants' everyday behaviour: as an older male worker put it, conversations with friends about ads tended to be

> ...along the lines of "Have you seen the new Carlsberg ad?". If no, then you get a brief description or not, depending on whether they leave it up to you to see it.

These descriptions indicated the terms and criteria used to categorise a range of ads, providing examples of how informants related to them and establishing a pool of ads for more detailed discussion. At this stage, discussion was often particularly lively. In terms of the dynamics of group development, "storming" behaviour (Foster 1989)

tended to occur, with some disagreements and struggles for control of the discussion in evidence. The researcher intervened little at this stage beyond trying to encourage quieter informants to offer their views or experiences, or broadening the discussion from television ads to those in other media.

A list was made of the ads as they were discussed, and those which were not familiar to everyone were eliminated. The remaining ads were written onto index cards, and used in a sorting task to generate more detailed discussion. As Foster (1989) observes, a change of pace helps to reduce "storming" tensions and encourages "norming" and "performing" behaviour, as the group settles and is ready to perform particular tasks. The sorting task was loosely based on the repertory grid technique, developed from psychologist George Kelly's personal construct theory (Stewart and Stewart 1981). Kelly defined a construct as "a way in which two or more things are alike and thereby different from a third or more things" (Fransella and Bannister 1977). He maintained that we make sense of our world by simultaneously noting similarities and differences between phenomena. He developed the repertory grid as a way of enabling people to show him their construct systems. This requires a set of elements (people, things, and so on) to be elicited from people or provided by the researcher. Traditionally, elements are then sorted into a variety of triads, and people are asked to generate constructs from them. In this study, the ads named on cards were used as elements. The cards were shuffled and presented in threes, and informants were asked to think of any ways in which two ads seemed similar and different from the third. Once several triads had been presented, all the cards were laid out on the coffee table, and informants were asked to sort them into groups.

Introducing this sorting task obviously moved away from naturalistic research methods, although Spradley (1979) argues that "card sorting" tasks help ethnographers understand how informants organise cultural knowledge. This approach was thought to be particularly useful here. Particularly in cases where the elements are not imposed by the researcher, Bannister (1981:196) argues that

> ...the major significance of the method lies still in the emphasis it places on the meaning which a person attaches to his or her world.

According to Stewart and Stewart (1981) repertory grids allow people to put verbal labels on pre-verbal, aestehtic or abstract concepts. This was thought to be an important contribution, given the problems of researching the meanings which people have for ads. As Olson (1986:282) notes,

> Included here are "meanings" that may well be represented in memory as visual images, feelings, emotions, tactile or olfactory meanings, or more abstract meanings...All of a consumer's meanings may not be represented in a neat, semantic, language-based form.

"Full grid" procedures (Stewart and Stewart 1981) move beyond the elicitation of elements and constructs to consider their underlying structure. From the pilot study, however, it became clear that a great deal of useful material could be obtained from a less formal approach. The grids stimulated comparisons between particular ads, with those comparisons acting as a springboard for further discussion. Furthermore, it was felt that the "full grid" approach was too tightly structured, and may serve to frustrate the spontaneity of the discussions.

Informants were asked whether they used any of the brands in the ads which had been used in the sorting task. This generally led into discussion about the effects of advertising, and about advertisers' intentions. The young adults were also asked whether they ever talked to other people about advertising, or whether they thought they would miss it if it disappeared. Towards the end of the discussion, they were shown a range of general interest (eg Radio Times) and young adult magazines (eg Sky and Cosmopolitan), and asked to pick out ads which struck them in any way. Again, this task generated a great deal of lively discussion, and some detailed interpretations of particular ads were offered. They were also asked to imagine what might have gone on at the advertising agency to develop the ads. In addition to offering further insights into informants' advertising literacy, this stage often led to discussion about the kind of people who worked in the advertising industry, and comments on particular ads sometimes led to the re-opening of earlier discussion.

As the discussion wound down, informants were asked how they had acquired their knowledge of advertising: whether they had had any classes about it at school, for example, or whether they could remember seeing television programmes about it. Finally, they were asked to fill in a brief questionnaire about their media use, thanked for participating, and invited to ask any questions about the research project. In the pilot study, the questionnaire was given to informants first. Performing this individual task delayed the start of the group "forming" process, so it was moved to the end. It was found to be a good way of winding down the group, allowing participants to chat among themselves and with the researcher rather than leaving abruptly once the tape-recorder was switched off.

3.8. Data Analysis

According to Marshall and Rossman (1989:112), data analysis brings order, structure and meaning to the material collected. They describe this as

> ...a messy, ambiguous, time-consuming, creative and fascinating process. It does not proceed in a linear fashion; it is not neat. Qualitative data analysis is a search for general statements about relationships among categories of data; it builds grounded theory.

The grounded theory approach to qualitative research was proposed by Glaser and Strauss (1967). They argued that theory (consisting of conceptual categories, their properties and relationships) should be derived from and illustrated by data. The grounded theory approach has several distinctive characteristics. Firstly,

> Joint collection, coding and analysis of data is the underlying operation. The generation of theory, coupled with the notion of theory as process, requires that all these operations be done together as much as possible (p43).

Secondly, grounded theory emerges from constant comparisons of instances from the data, so that tentative categories and their properties are identified. The emergent elements of the theory are modified and developed by comparison with instances from subsequent fieldwork and different cases, and further categories and properties emerge. Throughout this process, the researcher writes "analytic memos" which guide and record the emergent theory. Eventually, theory is delimited as fresh instances no longer point to new aspects, and categories are reduced to a smaller number of higher-order concepts. Glaser and Strauss also refer to the need for theoretical sampling, and Strauss (1987) argues that data should be coded according to a "coding paradigm" which incorporates conditions, interaction among actors, strategies and tactics, and consequences. However, he also points out that rigid methodological guidelines are inappropriate for social research, given the diversity of research objectives, settings, and even researchers.

In this case, while grounded theory provided a model for analysis, it was not possible to adhere completely to the Glaser and Strauss framework. Theoretical sampling, and indeed Strauss's coding paradigm, seemed less appropriate to this study than to research based on participant observation. The joint collection, coding and analysis of data was followed as far as possible, but was constrained by the availability of transcribing services and equipment. Thus, between interviews and group discussion, the researcher listened to the tapes, noted emergent themes, categories and relationships, and explored these further in subsequent groups or interviews.

Detailed analysis of transcripts took place when the fieldwork was completed. Over 900 pages of transcript were obtained from the group discussions and individual interviews. The data from the group discussions were analysed first, and in greatest detail. Following Thompson et al (1989), a part-to-whole mode of interpretation was used in analysing the transcripts. Each transcript was first examined as a distinct entity, and themes and patterns were sought within it. Separate transcripts were then related to each other, so that common themes and differences could be identified.

In generating categories, a balance was sought between "lived" and "conceptually abstract" concepts (Thompson et al 1989). As Glaser and Strauss (1967:114) observe,

> To make theoretical sense of so much diversity in his data, the analyst is forced to develop ideas on a level of generality higher in conceptual abstraction than the qualitative material being analysed.

Qualitative research, focusing on the informant's perspective, requires the researcher to "bracket" preconceived ideas and theories, and refrain from imposing them on the data. Nonetheless, Glaser and Strauss argue that some categories may be usefully borrowed from existing theory, although they may need to be adapted in some way to fit the data. In this case, an attempt was made to be as open as possible in the search for material relating to "attitudes", "involvement" and "literacy", and receptive to other themes and patterns in the data. Indeed, the literature on uses and gratifications, intertextuality, and decoding was consulted in response to patterns which emerged in the data and did not seem to be addressed in the advertising management literature.

Transcripts were not broken down into precise "units" for analysis; in some cases the unit was a word (a reference to "voiceovers" was coded as relating to literacy), while in others the unit consisted of several paragraphs (accounts of identification with ad characters were coded as relating to involvement in some way). Each piece of text was given as many codes as it required. When a transcript was coded, it was re-read as a whole, and a summary of its key themes was made, in order to achieve an "ideographic understanding" (Thompson et al 1989).

When all the material from the group discussions was coded, the transcripts were examined and compared in relation to particular themes. During this process of constant comparative analysis, the researcher also considered her own experience of advertising and informal conversations with others about ads. Glaser and Strauss

(1967:67) refer to such "anecdotal comparisons" as another form of triangulation:

> Through his own experiences, general knowledge, or reading, and the stories of others, the sociologist can gain data on other groups that offer useful comparisons.

From the broad categories, more detailed concepts emerged at this stage. As suggested by Glaser and Strauss, lower-level concepts emerged more quickly, while higher level or integrating concepts took longer. As "theoretical saturation" (Glaser and Strauss 1967) set in, few new insights into conceptual categories were obtained, and the theory began to cohere. An attempt was made to refine the emerging theory by searching for negative instances of phenomena. For example, given many positive examples of involvement, cases were sought of someone expressing a lack of involvement, or even negative involvement. The emergent theory had to account for these cases, or be modified in order to accommodate them.

When data relating to each broad category had been analysed in this way, the notes or "analytic memos" written while coding were used to write up the analysis. The original transcripts were frequently consulted at this stage, in order to check direct quotations or to clarify the context of comments. Some differences between informants emerged from this coding process, but comparisons were facilitated by re-reading the transcripts in a sequence based first on occupational status, and then on age and gender.

The individual interviews had contributed to the preliminary analysis during the fieldwork. Transcripts from the interviews were analysed and used to clarify, elaborate upon, and challenge the emergent theory from the analysis of the group discussions. Again, particular attention was paid to negative instances.

4. ASSESSMENT OF THE RESEARCH

Before assessing the strengths and weaknesses of this particular study, it is necessary to consider how the "trustworthiness" of non-positivist research can be evaluated.

4.1. Establishing trustworthiness

As Wallendorf and Belk (1989) observe, all research needs to be examined for trustworthiness. Various criteria have been advocated and used in evaluating

qualitative research, some of these being closer to positivist perspectives than others.

Sykes (1990) presents a review of the traditional positivist criteria of reliability and validity with respect to qualitative research. She notes that the term "validity" is used in many different ways, and relates to the type, accuracy and status of the findings. For example, face validity concerns the extent to which the data appear to address the issues being researched, while internal validity refers to the coherence of the data. Qualitative research tends to perform well on these criteria: quotations lend face validity, and the flexibility and responsiveness of qualitative research methods allow for cross-checking of data as it is collected, thereby reducing ambiguity and contradictions.

While validity addresses the meaningfulness of data, reliability addresses the consistency of results. It is particularly concerned with the extent to which results would be replicated if conducted by different researchers, or by the same researchers over time. Sykes notes that the flexibility, researcher-respondent interactions, and lack of rigid experimental controls characterising qualitative research are not conducive to replication. While it would be unrealistic to expect identical results and interpretations across researchers, respondents and settings, she argues that what becomes important is that the process of data collection and interpretation is transparent, and that others presented with the data could see how the researcher arrived at that interpretation.

Related to concerns about reliability, the validity of inferences made from qualitative research has been questioned. Critics point to small and non-random samples, and the emphasis on inductive rather than hypothetico-deductive modes of analysis. While some argue that qualitative research generates hypotheses without testing them on fresh data sets, others, including Glaser and Strauss (1967:17) argue that theory

> ...is not just discovered but verified, because the provisional character of the linkages - of answers and hypotheses concerning them - gets checked out during the succeeding phases of enquiry, with new data and new coding.

Discussing the issue of generalisation, McQuarrie and McIntyre (1988) distinguish between the existence and incidence of phenomena. While "incidence" generalisations are not appropriate from qualitative research, they argue that it is possible to make "existence" generalisations. Quinn Patton (1986, in Sykes 1990:308) suggests that extrapolations may be made from qualitative data. These

are

> ...modest speculations on the likely applicability of findings to other situations under similar, but not identical conditions. Extrapolations are logical, thoughtful and problem-oriented rather than purely empirical, statistical and probabilistic.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) discuss four main questions concerning the trustworthiness of any research. They argue that positivist criteria for assessing research are incompatible with the naturalistic paradigm, and propose alternative criteria for assessing naturalistic research. Their approach has been adopted by non-positivist researchers such as Hirschman (1986) and Belk et al (1988). Table 5.3. summarises the Lincoln and Guba framework for evaluating research.

TABLE 5.3. EVALUATIVE CRITERIA FOR RESEARCH

Question	Positivist criteria	Non-positivist criteria
Truth value: How do we know whether to have confidence in the findings?	**Internal validity:** assumes a mirroring of research with a single external reality	**Credibility:** Are the representations of reality constructions adequate and believable?
Applicability: How do we know the degree to which the findings apply in other contexts?	**External validity:** conflicts with non-positivist challenge to goal of generalising	**Transferability:** Can working hypotheses be employed in other contexts, based on an assessment of similarity?
Consistency: How do we know the findings would be repeated if the study could be replicated in essentially the same way?	**Reliability:** assumes stability and replicability, unlike non-positivism	**Dependability:** Was interpretation constructed in a way which avoids instability beyond that of social phenomena?
Neutrality: How do we know the degree to which the findings emerge from the context and the respondents, not soley from the researcher?	**Objectivity:** Assumes an independence between knower and known which is denied by non-positivists	**Confirmability:** Can the researcher's construction of an interpretation be traced by following data and other records?

Source: Y.S. Lincoln and E. Guba (1985) Naturalistic inquiry, Beverly Hills: Sage, 289-301

This study used several of the methods proposed by Lincoln and Guba to establish trustworthiness. It sought out negative cases of phenomena for analysis, and employed triangulation across sources (practitioners and young adults) and methods (individual interviews and group discussions). It used peer debriefings on various occasions: the researcher discussed data and interpretations with colleagues from a range of social science backgrounds, submitted a portion of the research to blind review, and presented it at a conference. A formal "member check" was conducted on the practitioner research. Informal member checks (Wallendorf and Belk 1989) were used among the young adults, as ideas from one group or individual were fed into subsequent research for comment.

A formal "audit" of this study was not undertaken. The researcher's notes and "analytic memos", together with the tapes, transcripts and this thesis document certainly constitute an "audit trail". As Wallendorf and Belk observe, the external auditors' task becomes extremely cumbersome when faced with a mountain of such material, and in any case, auditors can only offer a subjective assessment of the project. Indeed, Holt (1991:60) has referred to such audits as "a construction of a construction of a construction". As an alternative, Wallendorf and Belk suggest that researchers should provide enough verbatim material to enable to readers to assess confirmability themselves. That approach was taken in this study.

In addition to the Lincoln and Guba criteria, Wallendorf and Belk propose an assessment of informants' integrity, by using negative case analysis, common-sense and introspection. This study tried to employ these methods as a general principle, although not in the spirit of catching respondents out in some way. For example, in one group there was a great deal of discussion about Aids and drug awareness campaigns, and someone said that he knew people who had died from drug-taking and had not listened to anyone. A colleague suggested that this may have been said "for effect" in the group. However, the informant's body language and intensity made his statement credible: he also lived in an area associated with drug-related problems.

While the procedures outlined above may be seen as attempts to establish the trustworthiness of this research, Holt (1991) rejects the assumption that the "trustworthiness" element of naturalistic research can be isolated and objectively verified. He sees the popularity of the Lincoln and Guba framework as an attempt to legitimise naturalistic consumer research in a positivist climate. In the tradition of interpretive anthropology, Holt argues that

> ...specific techniques cannot act as guarantors of privileged status in what is necessarily an interpretive process...Like all other elements of the interpretation, research methods are judged by the reader. It is only in interaction with the reader that the interpretation can develop privileged status as a credible and insightful work (p 61).

While these criteria are by nature subjective (and seem to return to issues of face validity), Holt argues that they are not anarchic; readers can compare interpretations with the data provided to support them. Similarly, Glaser and Strauss argue that qualitative studies convey credibility by explaining clearly how theory was generated from data, by providing readers with a vicarious experience of the fieldwork, and by the level of clarity and integration of theory. Thus, researchers should present the data

> ...so vividly that the reader, like the researchers, can almost literally see and hear its people - but always in relation to the theory (p 228).

4.2. Limitations and contribution of this study

Several limitations to the study should be noted. Firstly, the methods used constitite a restricted form of audience ethnography: group discussions among strangers are a particularly contrived method. There is also the problem of using verbal methods to address "visual literacy" or meanings which may not be simply semantic. The repertory grid approach was used in an effort to reduce this problem, but cannot eliminate it.

Secondly, this research was conducted in one Scottish city, and its findings are grounded in that cultural context. As Tynan and Drayton (1986) observe, qualitative research has frequently been challenged for its use of small samples, which precludes generalisations about the population at large. According to Lipstein (1975), however, increasing sample size does not necessarily increase accuracy: many other errors may be made as the size increases. For this study, the sample size enabled patterns and dimensions of young adults' advertising experiences to be explored and compared. Furthermore, in keeping with the non-positivist paradigm, there was no intention to estimate the incidence of such patterns and dimensions within the general 18-24 year-old population. In terms of the young adult sample, age, gender and occupational status offer a limited basis for comparison. Some further information was obtained through a questionnaire concerning media habits and preferences, but time and space constraints prevented this information being used.

Several comments are worth making at this point regarding the underlying assumptions of the procedures used in the main phase of the study. It could be argued that they presumed a high level of informant interest, recall, and understanding with respect to advertising. This may well be true. However, the stimulus material and the way in which it was described essentially came from informants themselves, and subsequent discussion was based on this material. If informants had few beliefs or attitudes about advertising, or if they were not involved or literate with respect to it, then the groups or individual interviews would have been short and superficial: that in itself would have been an interesting finding. Similarly, it could be thought that the findings, particularly in the case of group discussions, could not indicate how young adults respond to ads outside the research setting. However, given the emphasis in this research on informant-generated descriptions and evaluations, it is argued that this study allowed them to express their cumulative experience and tacit knowledge of advertising.

Overall, it is argued that this study provides a foundation for greater understanding in this area. This study offers a less fragmented view of consumers' advertising experiences than the literature to date appears to have provided: it focuses on attitudes, involvement, and literacy simultaneously, and on advertising in general as well as a range of particular ads. Adopting a non-positivist, non-managerial and non-American perspective, it redresses some of the imbalances in previous academic advertising research. The study also addresses the question of advertising experiences from a range of perspectives. Thus, academic and practitioner literature was reviewed. Empirical research was conducted with advertising research practitioners and "multiple comparison groups" of young adults. A combination of individual interviews and small group discussions was used in researching young adults' experiences of advertising, and the theory presented in the following chapters was grounded in and emerged from that data.

5. ORGANISATION OF RESULTS

Following discussion of the practitioners' perspective in Chapter Six, analysis of the young adult data is presented in six chapters. Their advertising literacy skills appear to permeate their experience of advertising, and so these are discussed prior to their attitudes and involvement. The range of uses and gratifications derived from advertising are then addressed, as are different ways in which ads were decoded.

Finally, differences in the young adults' advertising experiences are examined across boundaries of age, gender and occupational status.

The following chapters make extensive use of quotations. These are not attributed to particular people, but the characteristics of the group or individual are described. Thus, practitioner quotations are attributed to those working in a "research company" or an "advertising agency". Job titles are not provided as in some cases this would identify the individuals concerned. Similarly, one of the practitoners interviewed was a woman, but individual practitioners are always referred to as male, in order to protect anonymity. Quotations from young adults refer to their age, gender and occupational status, and indicate whether the source was an individual interview or group discussion. For example, "male graduate worker, 21-24" refers to an individual interview, while "female students, 18-20" refers to a group.

Finally, the analysis necessarily refers to a wide range of campaigns and individual ads. While it is not feasible to reproduce all these ads, those which are referred to most frequently or in most depth have been reproduced where possible. Print ads have been included in the text as close to the key reference as possible, and television ads are reproduced in a video cassette. The ads which have been reproduced are marked with an asterisk in the text. They are listed in Appendix D and are organised in blocks according to the relevant chapter.

CHAPTER SIX

PRELIMINARY RESEARCH: PRACTITIONERS' VIEWS OF ADVERTISING CONSUMERS

This chapter analyses the data from interviews with advertising research practitioners, exploring their perceptions of consumers' advertising-related attitudes, involvement and literacy. Practitioners' views on the relationship between consumers, ads and brands are also discussed, and the implications for advertising development and research are considered. Just as consumers were thought to hold ambivalent attitudes to advertising, practitioners expressed conflicting views of advertising consumers. The chapter concludes by examining these conflicts, and assessing their implications for an understanding of consumers' experience of advertising. Firstly, however, these issues are placed in context by briefly considering the working environment and practices of Scottish-based advertising researchers.

1. THE SCOTTISH ADVERTISING RESEARCH CONTEXT

Although many of the practitioners had personal reasons for basing themselves in Scotland, London tended to be their point of reference. This is not surprising, as the advertising and research industries are concentrated there. Indeed, most of those interviewed had worked in London at some point, and there were frequent references to lost business "going South". Clients were thought to be more sophisticated "down South", and Scottish business practice was often thought to lag behind London standards. Thus, the practitioners frequently expressed a sense of professional frustration or isolation. For example, the advertising planning function was described as "in its infancy" in Scotland, so that campaigns were not necessarily developed or implemented in a strategic and research-oriented manner. One planner thought that for a long time, he had been the only Scottish-based practitioner with a "proper training" in qualitative research. Another described the "constant flow of research" in his agency, and claimed

> We're fairly out of step with Scottish advertising agencies...what we do here is typical of a large number of London agencies. [advertising agency]

Practitioners based in research companies complained that, unlike their London counterparts, they were not brought into the advertising development process early enough. Not only did this deprive them of business, but it seemed to be interpreted as a denial of trust and a slight to their sense of professionalism, as they believed that they could help agencies at early stages of the process.

While Scottish business practice was thought to lag behind London in some respects, it was suggested that consumers in Scotland were at least as sophisticated as those in other British regions, and that they benefited from a broader-based education, "even at the bottom rung". Exposed to roughly the same media as elsewhere, Scottish consumers were described as "avid watchers of television", who "absorb newspapers" and had quickly adopted new communications technology such as VCRs and satellite dishes.

Consumers in Central Scotland were thought to be more sophisticated in terms of general lifestyles and response to ads than those in the North. Within the "Central Belt", the contrast between Edinburgh and Glasgow was a talking point, with Glasgow seen as the more dynamic and vibrant city. However, consumers in the two cities were thought to differ more in their reactions to being interviewed than in their response to advertising:

> Glasgow people will talk to you about anything whereas Edinburgh people, particularly up-market AB housewives, are so reserved...they all sit round in a wee circle and they only speak when spoken to...in Glasgow, same group, the problem is stopping them talking, trying to keep them on the same subject. [research company]

In the advertising development process, qualitative research was thought to play an important part. It provided insights into the "range of light and dark and shading" of consumers' response to advertising concepts or executions. However, the practitioners often found themselves having to defend the approach, as clients (and advertising agency creatives) were not always thought to understand it.

Group discussions, rather than individual interviews, were the mainstay of advertising development research. This was partly due to time and financial constraints, but also because general responses, rather than individualistic reactions, were usually sought. In terms of the approaches and procedures used in group discussions, the individuality and art of research work was emphasised: each advertising researcher was considered to have different ways of arriving at similar

results.

The practitioners also emphasised the difference between research conditions and the normal circumstances in which consumers see ads. In research, consumers were presented with a limited number of ads, and asked to attend to them. In real life, however, they "get ads from all sides", and were free to ignore them. Thus, while the ability to gain attention is an important criterion for advertising effectiveness, group discussions could not assess this directly:

> I'll sometimes say "Well, you seem to have got the message of that quite well", and they'll say "it's only because you made us watch it". [research company]

In practice, this problem was dealt with by building in a "tolerance factor" to the interpretation of research to compensate for consumers being "made" to look at ads. This was presented as a matter of judgment rather than a routine procedure, reinforcing the "art" of research and the professional standing of those who conduct it.

As the ads shown in a group did not have to be noticed in the same way as in "real life", there was also the problem of understanding how what consumers say about them is affected by the research context. This is obviously not a problem unique to advertising, or even qualitative, research. However, it was thought that participants in group discussions could also be influenced by the behaviour and views of others:

> ...you can never be entirely sure whether the reactions are different in a group. I suspect it brings to a head a lot of feelings that are there that possibly they wouldn't actually articulate or would never actually think about for long enough to even realise that they think about. [research company]

This "bringing to a head" was considered a useful function of group discussions, as it helped advertisers to tap in to consumers' latent thoughts and feelings. It was also thought to lead to problems of "hothousing", whereby consumers "homed in" on an ad and gave it unusually close attention. In general, consumers' "reading" of ads was thought to be fairly superficial, so that taking part in groups "makes them think about ads in more depth than they ever do". This was thought to lead to some ads which might be tolerated in real life being attacked when considered "close-up". Conversely, consumers were sometimes thought to

> ...go OTT and love to death an ad which in their everyday life they would just have bypassed very quickly. [advertising agency]

One method used to circumvent the pitfalls of hothousing was to accord most

importance to a group's initial responses. However, while the considered response may be more artificial and contrived, moving in to look at the detail was considered helpful in dissecting the total impression, and in checking for an ad's "gross negatives", or fundamental communication errors.

2. CONSUMERS' ATTITUDES TO ADVERTISING

According to the practitioners, when consumers referred to "advertising", they generally meant "television advertising". Consumers remembered and talked about television advertising more than any other kind. Indeed, ads which had only appeared in other media were often attributed to television. The practitioners, too, tended to discuss advertising in terms of television. This may have reflected the dominance of television in consumers' experience of advertising. Alternatively, it may have reflected practitioners' own priorities and working environment. In 1989, television accounted for 41% of UK expenditure on display advertising (Advertising Association 1991). Thus, on purely financial grounds, it must have absorbed considerable practitioner attention. Furthermore, advertising budgets which are too small for television are less likely to afford research. This would limit practitioners' understanding of consumers' experience with advertising in other media. Finally, due to its creative potential, large budgets, and high profile, practitioners may well consider television to be the most challenging and satisfying advertising medium. Thus, consumers' apparent preoccupation with television advertising may be reinforced or heightened by practitioners' own preoccupation with it.

Consistent with the literature reviewed in Chapter Two, practitioners observed a real ambivalence in consumers' approach to advertising. On the one hand, they appear to enjoy it, to be interested in it, and to be confident in expressing their opinions about it. They were also thought to be quite wary of advertising, and very resistant to the idea that it actually exerted any influence over them.

2.1 Consumers' love-hate relationship with advertising

> They love it, they love it. They watch it avidly, they'll always tell you the ads are more interesting than the programmes. [research company]

In general, practitioners perceived an increasing affinity between consumers and advertising. People seemed prepared to take advertising more seriously, and to

accept it as something worth talking about. This was attributed to their increased familiarity with advertising, but also to an improvement in the overall standard of ads:

> ...there's some very high quality advertising around, and people react to it and enjoy it and appreciate it that much more. [research company]

Some consumers displayed an extraordinary interest in and recall of advertising. Ads were sometimes remembered from ten, twelve, or fifteen years ago - often to the advertiser's despair, as campaigns would have changed dramatically since then. Consumers were also thought to be interested in the process by which ads are developed. One researcher recalled an occasion where an agency client sat in on a group. When it was over, and respondents were told where she was from, they were very curious, asking her what she actually did and "how it all worked". While respondents' curiosity may have been heightened by taking part in the group discussion, the incident was thought to reflect a general interest in advertising.

In addition to being interested in advertising, consumers were thought to be very confident in expressing their views on the subject:

> I don't know what it is really. You ask about nuclear fission and they're struggling, but everyone's got a view on whether the Nescafe ads are good or bad... [advertising agency]

> They're all experts, everyone thinks they're an expert! [research company]

Consumers also seemed to be aware of the importance of their role in the advertising process. In the first place, they were thought to recognise their own power, and their ability to choose whether to watch an ad or not. In the case of television, the first commercial in a break was thought to be particularly important; if it did not "hit the mark", all the other ads may suffer, as consumers might leave the room or fast-forward the videotape. Consumers were also thought to know that "without them, brands die", and that their potential custom made them important to advertisers. In this respect, marketing research was a very good if expensive public relations vehicle, as consumers

> ...by and large react very positively to the idea that they're being consulted...I think they enjoy being in a position where they can actually influence whatever is coming through to them. [research company]

So far, the consumer emerges as a confident, active and self-selected participant in the advertising process, interested in and appreciating the efforts of both researchers and advertisers. No doubt this was very reassuring to the practitioners; for

professionals, the approval and appreciation of clients and the public should rank as important non-monetary rewards for their efforts (Van Doren and Smith 1987). While the objectivity of such impressions could be questioned, they are consistent with the high levels of public approval for advertising reported in Chapter Two.

Underlying the complexity and ambivalence of attitudes to advertising, however, consumers appeared to have these positive views almost against their better judgment. Some saw advertising as an attempt to "get at them", and at their own expense, as products would be cheaper without advertising. However, one practitioner dismissed such sentiments as the preserve of a "Guardian-reading segment" of the population. Two possible reasons were suggested for the generally low profile of economic concerns among consumers. The first explanation was that they understood the dynamics of advertising and the market economy better than to expect reduced advertising to lower prices: this is consistent with the view of the consumer as confident and knowledgeable participant in the advertising process. An alternative explanation, assuming more passive consumers, was that they rarely connected the cost of advertising to the cost of products.

The practitioners agreed that consumers were cynical about advertising. Aware that it exists "to sell you things...to get you to buy it", consumers were unconvinced by product claims such as one lager being more "full-bodied" than another. There was some uncertainty about whether cynicism was increasing or decreasing. One the one hand, consumers were thought to be "slightly more jaundiced" than before regarding various product claims. However, it was suggested that they were less cynical about advertising in general. This was in part attributed to consumers' growing awareness of advertising controls, leading them to believe that advertisers "wouldn't be allowed to say it if it wasn't true":

> This has established a basis of trust between consumers and advertising...they're less defensive towards advertising now. [research company]

In addition to reassuring those in the advertising industry that they are doing a good job, this view echoes traditional professional concern for the public's well-being. The references to controls on ads are consistent with professional codes of conduct designed to protect consumers (and the profession as a whole) from dubious practices of deviant practitioners. The notion of increasing trust between advertisers and consumers did not go unchallenged, however; another practitioner argued that while review boards may enhance the credibility of claims in general, individual consumers may still not believe a claim at a personal level.

Some of consumers' professed sceptisism was interpreted as a defence against the threat to their sense of autonomy: admitting to being influenced by ads indicates a loss of control over purchasing behaviour. If advertising could be dismissed or discredited, then, it would be easier to believe that it had no effect. Therefore, research tended to be conducted in the face of consumers protesting that

> "I don't like advertising, I'm never affected by advertising...I'm an intelligent human being, I make up my own mind, advertising has no impact on me". [research company]

Indeed, group discussions often began with a virtual ritual of denial, with consumers initially insisting that they paid no attention to advertising. One practitioner had the impression that consumers taking part in groups felt misunderstood, thinking

> "I know I'm here in the group discussion trying to help you make better ads, based on the premise that ads will work on me, and what I'm trying to tell you is that I'm immune to it all". [advertising agency]

Again, however, there was a feeling that such attitudes had mellowed over the years, and that consumers had become less defensive about advertising. Nonetheless, there appeared to be a basic irony in the way that consumers and advertising practitioners approached each other. Practitioners referred to a growing sense of trust and affinity between themselves and consumers. However, they also recognised consumers' cynicism regarding some aspects of advertising, and their own comments indicate some distrust of consumers. Thus, they built "tolerance factors" into their interpretation of consumers' professed response to ads, believing them to be more superficial in their "normal" responses. Furthermore, practitioners did not challenge consumers who protested that ads did not influence them, although clearly they did not believe them.

While consumers may not be willing to admit that advertising influenced them, practitioners were gratified that consumers often talked about enjoying it:

> There are more people saying "that's a great ad" - appreciation for the art form, if you like. [advertising agency]

Indeed, the practitioners noted that where ads were strongly liked or disliked, they became part of our folklore, and absorbed into other forms of popular culture. For example, Nescafe's Gold Blend campaign, tracking the relationship between a man and a woman, was the subject of newspaper and magazine articles and comedy acts. In such cases, ads were thought to be absorbed back into other forms of popular culture, as that is where many advertising themes, styles and formats originated:

> ...advertising draws from people's experience which is not to do with advertising.
> [advertising agency]

This perspective not only recognises the intertextuality of advertising (Wernick 1991; Cook 1992), but also assumes the consumer to be an active participant in the creation of ad meanings: as Williamson (1978) and McCracken (1986) have pointed out, ads cannot make sense unless consumers bring external references to bear on their interpretations. Thus, the Gold Blend campaign borrowed heavily from soap opera traditions, and consumers' understanding of this helped shape their interpretation of it. Similarly, when celebrities featured in an ad, practitioners thought they had to have "been in the right thing" for the brand, as consumers used their knowledge of the celebrity's prior roles to make sense of the ad.

While references in comedy programmes or editorial comment in the media may indicate that some ads were "really being taken into peoples' minds...and really getting noticed", the situation may not be quite so simple or positive from the advertiser's point of view. For example, discussing a lager ad, a practitioner suggested that people

> ...loved it or hated it as a piece of theatre, not in terms of what it was trying to say or do to lager drinkers or the lager market. Most of the ads - and quite rightly too - are viewed on their entertainment value. [advertising agency]

Another spoke of the way in which consumers judged ads on their entertainment value, while "deflecting consciously" their sales pitch. This suggests that "ads as art form" may be just a more sophisticated defence against advertising's persuasive power: banishing advertising to some mental "entertainment" ghetto may be the active consumer's way of denying its influence over purchasing behaviour.

In a sense, the British advertising industry could be accused of colluding with consumers in this respect. Its work is characterised by the use of humour, entertainment, and an "oblique" approach to communicating brand benefits. This was attributed to "the British instinct to side-step, to evade the direct approach", rooted in a traditional distaste and embarrassment about "selling". For example, humour in ads was described as

> ...almost a way of getting around to "Well, here we've entertained you and by the way we're selling something". And the person says "That's a really good ad"...and both the advertiser and the consumer feel comfortable because there's no overt sales message. [research company]

This discretion was contrasted with the "pushy" style generally associated with American advertising, caricatured as "here's the box, here's the label, get out and buy

it, kills more roaches". This certainly demonstrates the other extreme. However, it is interesting that practitioners looked to America for comparisons, rather than to their closer European neighbours.

2.2. Particular likes and dislikes

While consumers' likes and dislikes were thought to depend on the specific situation, product and target audience, it was suggested that music and humour were two keys to successful ads, as these approaches tended to be noticed, liked and remembered. "Catchy" music was seen as a favourite: in research, if consumers did not like an ad, they often suggested that it needed "a bit of a tune to it". Good music in television ads was seen to have another benefit: it could be heard and identified even if consumers had left the room. Indeed, in some cases, consumers admitted rushing back to watch and listen to ads which they enjoyed. Humour was seen as valuable but quite difficult to get right. For example, the tongue-in-cheek approach was not thought to work as well in the North of Scotland as in the Central Belt, due to different lifestyles and attitudes. Ads with stories and characters were also well liked; one practitioner referred to frequent requests for "Oxo-type" ads, where the relationship between various family members and a product was featured. Episodic approaches were thought to be popular for the suspense and the continuity which they offered.

While obvious commercial statements were not particularly liked, it was suggested that these at least had the benefit of being easily rejected by the consumer. Serious, monotonous ads were generally disliked, as were those which were considered coercive, misleading or patronising. The issue of voiceovers appeared to be particularly sensitive. In the past, Scottish voiceovers had often been added to English ads, in order to improve their acceptability among Scots. As Scottish attitudes had become "less parochial", however, such voiceovers were considered insulting and patronising unless they were for Scottish brands. Thus, practitioners reported responses along the lines of "those London agencies think we're a bunch of Jocks up here". Once again, the level of interpretation required to reach such a judgment would suggest an active and sophisticated advertising consumer.

3. CONSUMERS' INVOLVEMENT WITH ADVERTISING

"Involvement" was a word which most of the practitioners used spontaneously in discussing consumers' response to ads. They understood it to be an active rather than passive response to an ad, whereby consumers allowed it to "float around in their heads", rather than dismissing it as an interruption. The practitioners often discussed involvement in emotional terms, referring to consumers "having relationships with ads", or "being caught up in", "drawn into", "held by" or "empathising" with them:

> It's like...I think if you watch a good film...I'm gripped by it, and I hope I suspend rational thought, in a sense. [advertising agency]

Involvement was thought to occur when consumers related to the situations, images, or characters in an ad, finding them relevant to their own lives, attitudes, or fantasies - even to the extent of being able to project themselves into the situation portrayed. One practitioner referred to this as the "me factor":

> They have bought into it so they are talking about me and my response and my reaction and my belief. [research company]

Thus, in the case of an ad whose main character greatly appealed to children,

> They were totally into him, they understood his life, they understood him, understood what he was doing, the mistakes he made: he was part of their life...he was them, they became him. [advertising agency]

Thus, the practitioners' view seems consistent with academic conceptualisations of involvement in terms of personal relevance. It also indicates deeper levels of ad processing, such as the "role-taking" described by MacInnis and Jaworski (1989) or the "elaboration" level proposed by Greenwald and Leavitt (1984). Baker and Lutz (1987) would presumably consider the practitioners to be focusing on advertising executions. However, as Boller and Olson (1991) point out, "drama" ads offer consumers opportunities for vicarious experiences, and the ads discussed by practitioners in this context appear to fall into this category.

Curiosity was seen as another route to involvement, although it was suggested that an emotional response was also needed. In the case of the Gold Blend campaign, for example, "people are actually waiting to see what happens in the relationship". In general, there was thought to be

> ... much more teasing going on just now, much more attempt to engage people's interest and lead them on through the advertising campaigns, and much less emphasis on giving them the total picture, wallop! [research company]

In addition to maintaining people's curiosity throughout a campaign, it was also thought important that people could find individual ads entertaining over time. When everything was absorbed after the first few exposures, an ad wore out very quickly, with people "mentally switching off", or finding it irritating. Therefore, a richness of detail might be built into ads, so that consumers could find something different in it after seeing it several times. For example, a television commercial for "Hush Puppies" shoes featured a 1950s-style American cafe, with actors dressed as dogs: the button which one of them pressed on the jukebox was labled "K-9".

In line with perceptions of an increased affinity with advertising, consumers were thought to have become more involved with ads over the past ten years. Once again, this was largely attributed to improvements in advertising itself: involvement was considered

> ...part of this general trend towards appealing to the viewer as a person rather than just treating them as a buying unit...you've got to treat it as a conversation, as if you were talking to a friend or whatever...I think generally advertising agencies are getting much better at achieving this... [research agency]

However, there was strong disagreement with any prescription that advertising should strive continually for the "personal touch". Involvement was not necessarily thought to be the same for every product, ad, or market: the "triggers" may be a product's imagery, its "magic", or even its practical benefits. Thus, involvement does not seem to be considered one-dimensional by the practitioners. What was important, it was argued, was that the target market and the product were understood, so that the advertiser could "make" people interested in it. In contrast to this last perspective was the belief that involvement occurs with

> ...people treating advertising as though it's much more than what it actually set out to do - it's entertainment and all sorts of things as well as just something which is designed to sell products. [research company]

Obviously ads may "actually set out to do" much more than sell products, but this practitioner allows consumers a more active role in the advertising process than is suggested by comments about ads "making" people interested. Rather than simply responding to a given stimulus, they are seen as participating in the creation of its meaning. In this case, the danger for practitioners was that consumers might use the entertainment to pigeon-hole it as "ad as art form", at the expense of "ad as

influencer".

3.1. Indicators and consequences of involvement

While involvement with ads was considered to happen internally, at an individual level, some observable consequences were discussed. Extreme examples were cases of consumers sending fan mail to the "stars" of ads, or videotaping ads to replay them over and over again. The ads which consumers claimed to have taped, however, tended to be similar to rock videos, with soundtracks from bands who already had a following; this could be considered involvement with "ad-as-art-form" only.

Less dramatic indicators were also thought to exist. Many consumers claimed to look forward to ads, to appreciate their entertainment value, and to choose to watch ads during commercial breaks: this suggests that consumers may be involved with advertising in general as well as with particular ads or ad elements. People were also thought to be willing to talk about ads which they found involving. In group discussions, if people really liked a particular ad, they would talk about it a lot, wonder about the characters within it, try to project themselves into the scenario, or even find analogies for the situation portrayed. Beyond the research situation, talking about ads in social situations with friends - in the pub for example - was thought to be a sign of involvement with those ads. Ads which consumers claimed to have talked about in this way tended to be amusing, "different" or even disturbing in some way. In some cases, silence was also taken as an indicator of involvement, particularly in the cinema:

> I remember times when people just talked through the ads at cinemas, rustling all their sweets and stuff like that...and [now] people actually watch the ads. [advertising agency]

Most practitioners considered involvement important in helping consumers to develop relationships with brands, as was thought to have been the case with "classics" such as Andrex or Hamlet ads. When the situation portrayed was seen to be involving,

> ...you're presenting a relevant picture, and your product gets strapped on the back of that so therefore the product is relevant. [advertising agency]

Advertising involvement was thought to be particularly important when it is difficult for consumers to distinguish between products in terms of quality or performance. Thus, in the absence of distinct product benefits, it was vital that consumers enjoyed

ads and wanted to see them again. Echoing Detsiny's comments (Clark 1989) one practitioner suggested that with lager

> People say they drink the advertising, not the lager, and so when they're buying the lager, they're buying also the values that they pick up from the advertising. So it's actually quite important that they like and do get involved with the advertising. [research company]

However, practitioners also emphasised the dangers of striving for involvement as an end in itself when developing ads: involvement was worthless if consumers attributed an ad to the wrong brand. Furthermore, the "flogging on" of brands to the "involving" ad elements was thought to be misguided: unless the brand is an integral part of the ad,

> ...you've got a nice ad, but it doesn't actually bring you nearer to the brand.
> [advertising agency]

3.2. Conditions for involvement

The practitioners tended to consider advertising involvement to be driven by consumers' involvement with products, or by the characteristics of particular ads. Thus, if people were interested in or involved with a product, there was thought to be greater potential for them to become involved in an ad for it, "because you're so close to that product, it pulls you in". If a product had no relevance or interest for consumers, they were less likely to become involved in its advertising. This view is consistent with theories of brand choice involvement discussed in Chapter Three, although the consequences of such involvement for ad response were couched in emotional rather than information-processing terms by the practitioners. In the absence of prior product involvement, a "good enough commercial" was still thought capable of "drawing consumers into an ad", and perhaps to the brand, if the ad "strikes a strong enough emotional chord".

The interplay between product and advertising involvement was thought to be different for the various media. Contrary to Krugman's (1966-67) view, it was thought to be more difficult for ads in the press than those on television to build a relationship between consumers and a brand, as television engaged more of the senses. However, in the case of products such as cars and consumer durables, press ads may provide functional information, and appeal to consumers already involved with the product and about to choose between brands.

4. CONSUMERS' ADVERTISING LITERACY

While there was some disagreement about the extent of peoples' understanding in relation to advertising, practitioners generally felt that over time, consumers had become more "advertising aware" and sophisticated in their approach to ads. As one practitioner put it,

> We never cease to be amazed at the subtleties and the understanding of the punters, the consumers in the marketplace. They've a much more finely-honed critical faculty about advertising than we often give them credit for. [advertising agency]

4.1. Indicators of literacy

In discussing the ways in which consumers demonstrated their critical faculty with respect to advertising, the practitioners echoed the literacy skills considered in Chapter Four. In the first place, consumers were thought to be aware of a "spectrum of different kinds of ads", categorising them in various ways. For example, they could distinguish between various "lifestyle" approaches, and between "state-of-the-art", "run-of-the-mill", and "old-fashioned" ads. They pilloried "naff" advertising, and responded to it in much the same way as "an English professor being handed a Mills & Boon novel". Ads featuring "Brand X" received particular scorn, as did "put-on" or affected approaches, which were seen as "out of touch" with real people.

Secondly, consumers talked about advertising in an increasingly sophisticated way. They "came out with the jargon" in group discussions, using professional terminology to describe their reactions to ads.

> They say something like "I didn't like the voiceover on that", whereas five years ago they might have said "I didn't like the man's voice" [research company]

The use of such specialist terms in group discussions had led some researchers to worry about their recruitment procedures, in case these respondents worked in advertising. However, practitioners now accepted that "the punters" were gradually absorbing marketing and advertising terminology. For example, consumers recognised that ads were "targeted" at particular "segments" of the market, and that advertising "appeals" were designed with the "lifestyle" of the "target audience" in mind.

Thirdly, consumers were considered "very sensitive to production values", and to the "look" of ads. They noticed the way in which products were presented and how ads

were shot. While they did not always know the technical terms (although their knowledge sometimes surprised practitioners), consumers could describe a range of techniques, and they could tell the difference between cheap and expensive ads. "Crass" video techniques, which had products flying through the air, were firmly associated with cheapness, while ads with a number of people, different sets, and good props were considered expensive. Expensive, well-produced ads were generally considered "classy" or "professional", and respected for that. Again, this was undoubtedly gratifying for the practitioners.

Wright (1986) coined the term "schemer schema" to describe consumers' intuitive theories about the ways marketers seek to influence them. The practitioners in this study certainly believed that consumers "can have a flavour for what the advertising is trying to do", and to whom. They were thought to be capable of distinguishing between ads aimed at them and at others, and could

> ...very quickly deflect advertising, and say "that's not aimed at me" if it isn't.
> [research company]

Consumers were also thought to have moved beyond simplistic ideas about ads "just trying to sell something", to an awareness that ads could serve a number of different purposes, from gaining awareness to enhancing a brand's image. This understanding was not just an abstract one:

> ...by and large, they have no difficulty detecting what the underlying strategy of an advertising campaign usually is. [research company]

For example, one practitioner remembered a group discussion concerning an ad intended to reinforce a particular health-related behaviour. Respondents not only discussed the merits of that approach, but debated the feasibility of targeting those whose behaviour had lapsed instead. In addition to understanding advertising objectives, consumers tended to distinguish between "effective" and "ineffective" ads. Thus,

> ...they'll throw this back at you, the extent to which it features the brand name or the product name, whether it's selling you anything, if it doesn't tell you enough to make you go out and buy. [research company]

This may seem to contradict consumers' professed immunity to advertising's persuasive powers. However, as Barnes (1982) has demonstrated, agreeing that advertising is influential is quite different from admitting its influence on a personal level. Furthermore, discussing the persuasive ability of an ad means adopting the

role of the detached observer - and detached observers are beyond an ad's circle of influence. Thus becoming an "ad critic" may be another way for consumers to present themselves as immune to advertising.

Another indicator of consumers' sophistication was thought to be their appreciation of the "ground rules" of advertising. They knew it was intended to "get a message over", and

> ...are slightly disturbed [when] an ad doesn't achieve that. It diminishes the value of the whole effort of communication if they realise it's not working. [research company]

People were generally thought to accept that ads do not represent reality, although they were often willing to enter into the fantasies provided. For example, when some tourism ads were being researched, consumers objected to those which showed threatening skies. It was not that they expected the weather to be constantly idyllic in the area, but they expected some "advertising licence". Indeed, it was suggested that consumers

> ...build into their response an allowance for what the advertiser is doing, and they expect an overclaim. And if you undercut, you're discounted anyway. [research company]

Ironically, this mirrors the "tolerance factor" which the practitioners applied to what consumers say in research. A related set of "rules" which were thought to be understood concerned the use of stereotypes. For example, consumers expected that ads would feature "slightly idealised good-looking characters", and when ordinary people were used, they were seen to "stand out as being slightly abnormal". Groups of housewives often objected to stereotyped sex role portrayals, and called for ads which showed men shopping or cooking. However, in many cases where this was done, ads were often criticised as "contrived", and role reversal "somehow often backfires". Similarly, certain product categories were associated with particular advertising approaches, and while these were considered cliched, deviations often suffered poor recall or were considered "not quite right". This seems very surprising, particularly in view of the apparent distaste for "naff" and run-of-the-mill advertising. It may be that ads which deviated from the "ground rules" or conventions interfered with consumers' "short-hand" devices, so that more time and effort was needed to make sense of them. Furthermore, such deviations may challenge consumers' beliefs that advertising could be easily pigeonholed and dismissed and was thus unlikely to influence them.

4.2. Reasons for advertising literacy

Once again, a contradiction arose in practitioners' discussion of consumers' advertising literacy. They frequently described this in terms of consumers' active and sophisticated participation in the creation of ad meanings. However, they seemed reluctant to admit that consumers themselves had much to do with the development of their sophistication. Instead, it was argued (particularly by the advertising agencies!) that advertising had improved in terms of production values and strategic direction. As consumers were exposed to so much good advertising, they had little option but to develop a "wide breadth of knowledge and experience" of ads. In other words,

> The British advertising industry is pretty sophisticated, and almost by definition, almost as a by-product, the British consumer is pretty sophisticated as well. [advertising agency]

Thus, consumers' ability to discriminate between advertising objectives and target audiences was considered to be largely a function of the ads themselves. For example, few consumers would be in any doubt as to the purpose of an ad announcing a sale. However, "generic" or corporate advertising was thought to cause particular confusion - "although if you make that fairly clear, then they'll understand it".

Consistent with Fiske's (1989a,b) notion of the "leaky boundaries" of popular culture, consumers were also thought to come across a great deal of general media comment and discussion about marketing and advertising. It was suggested that the Conservative party's extensive use of advertising had been a catalyst in bringing discussion and analysis of marketing issues to the general media. Increasingly, particular ads, agencies and campaigns were analysed in television and radio programmes, newspaper features, and magazine articles. While some of this was thought to be for those in the industry, many features were presented "as if everyone was a layman". One researcher spoke of a television programme, which was

> ..an awards ceremony for advertising - best actress, best use of music and what have you...an hour-long programme, that is going to be broadcast nationally, for people to sit and watch advertising awards. [research company]

That a television company would broadcast such an event was seen as an indication of the level of interest which people have in advertising, and their appreciation of its entertainment value. No doubt it could also be interpreted as an attempt by commercial television and the advertising industry to elevate the status of

advertising among consumers. Nonetheless, such programmes and features were thought to have given consumers a new vocabulary, a greater understanding of advertising, and perhaps a greater interest in its workings to boot.

Comparing these reasons to the factors suggested by Goodyear (1991) as contributing to advertising literacy, it is interesting to note that the practitioners tended to focus on factors specific to the advertising industry. They gave little thought to broader factors, such as the way in which the conventions of other cultural forms could be learned and applied to advertising.

4.3. Limits to literacy

Despite the view that consumers "can have a flavour" for advertisers' intentions, practitioners still felt that consumers were too ready with criticism when they did not like an ad, regardless of what it was trying to do or whether they were in the target market.

> My mother the other day saw the Silk Cut poster and said "I think that's a stupid ad, I don't understand that at all". And I said "do you smoke?", and she said no. So I said "well then, it's not aimed at you". [research company]

While this seems a disingenuous view of cigarette advertisers' targeting strategies (Chapman 1986), consumers' tendency to criticise ads out of context was discussed by several practitioners. They admitted to catching themselves out on occasion, as they sometimes forgot that an ad which they derided may be appropriate for its brief and target audience. However, when such criticisms came from consumers, practitioners used this to downplay consumers' advertising sophistication.

Although consumers were considered capable of identifying expensive ads, the practitioners agreed that they "don't have a clue" about the scale of production or media costs. Thus, in judging ads, it was suggested that consumers "don't take budgets into account". As Scottish agencies presumably deal with lower budgets than their counterparts "down South", it is understandable that they may feel aggrieved at consumers' failure to recognise the constraints under which they operated.

Finally, consumers were thought to be generally quite superficial in their "reading" of ads, although researchers had noticed several levels of response. On the first, literal level, people simply played back what was said about the brand and its

benefits. On the second level, various elements of an ad were used as cues to make inferences about the brand: voiceovers, music, pace, and the "jazziness" or "classiness" of the presentation for example were used in this way. Similarly, the kind of people featured in ads were used to make inferences about typical users of the product. While the practitioners considered this level of interpretation unremarkable, it suggests more complex and sophisticated processing of "peripheral cues" than suggested by the ELM (Petty and Cacioppo 1981). On the third and most subtle level, consumers were thought to respond to the values and attitudes implied in the ad, for example in terms of sex-role portrayals. This was not thought to be a particularly common level of response, however. There was some doubt expressed about the extent to which consumers read print ads, and in the case of television,

> If it's an interesting ad they'll watch it and gradually awareness may dawn. I'm not sure they'd sit down and say "What's that ad all about?" [research company]

This reinforces researchers' concern about "hothousing" effects in group discussions, as it was thought that it was only in such circumstances that people would focus their attention and efforts on "finding the meaning" of ads. However, this raises issues regarding other research effects. Group discussions, the mainstay of advertising development research, are by definition concerned with the group response and "broad brush" reactions. It seems surprising that discussion in these groups ever reaches the third level of response, particularly as researchers (trying to avoid hothousing) would be unlikely to encourage it. There also remains the issue of tacit knowledge: perhaps "level three" responses were rare in groups because they were perceived as so obvious that they did not need to be discussed.

5. DIFFERENCES IN ADVERTISING EXPERIENCES BETWEEEN CONSUMERS

The practitioners emphasised the difficulties of generalising about consumers' attitudes, involvement and literacy with respect to advertising. While everyone was thought to have a view on advertising and confidence in their pronouncements about it, young people, particularly those aged 15-24, were thought to be the most interested in advertising and involved with its imagery. They were also thought to be the most demanding, for example by expecting it to possess some of the qualities of film. However, adolescents were also thought to be particularly dismissive and critical of advertising. Practitioners in turn tended to dismiss their negative stance,

attributing it to a general "bloody-mindedness" and reluctance to admit that anything might be acceptable. Such "bloody-mindedness", coupled with concerns about the impression they were making on their peers, was thought to make group discussions with adolescents quite difficult.

Another constraint on young people's response to advertising was thought to be that, due to their socialising, they watched relatively little television. Audience statistics (Advertising Association 1991) certainly support this view. In absolute terms, however, young people still watched quite a lot of television: a Scottish survey found that 81% of young people watched some television seven days a week, with 59% claiming to watch between two and five hours a day (System Three 1989). Furthermore, if young people watch less television than others, they may be more selective viewers. This increases the likelihood of exposure to ads aimed at them, which may lead to perceptions of advertising in general as relevant and interesting. It was also suggested that "young, hip and aware" consumers were likely to see programmes about advertising, enhancing their sophistication. For example, a practitioner referred to a recent "youth" programme which included a feature on jeans advertising, explaining how models were chosen and "previewing" the next ad in a campaign.

The practitioners also talked about children's enjoyment of advertising, claiming that they tended to watch the ads which accompanied their favourite programmes. This is hardly surprising in the case of children's programming, as the ads tend to be for products such as toys or children's breakfast cereals. However, children were also found to like ads for products used by adults. The practitioners were also "constantly reminded" of children's advertising sophistication. Some spoke from direct experience as parents themselves, while others referred to research with children, or with adults who commented on the way in which their children responded to various ads.

Housewives were thought to be heavy television viewers, and to have great recall of ads. It was suggested, however, that they were "less intellectually drawn" by ads than younger adults. Older adults were also thought to watch a lot of television, and to be exposed to a great deal of advertising. However, they were not thought to expect ads to entertain them, or to incorporate styles or techniques from films - not that they would recognise these in any case.

While age was the main factor considered, consumers' experience of advertising was

also thought to differ according to consumers' social class and location. "Professional" and "more up-market" people (like the practitioners themselves) were thought to have more sophisticated advertising vocabularies, to spend more time looking at ads, and to respond to them less superficially. Finally, those living in Scotland's "Central Belt" were thought to be more sophisticated advertising consumers than those in the North, due to their more "varied" and "sophisticated" lifestyles.

6. THE IMPLICATIONS OF CONSUMERS' ATTITUDES, INVOLVEMENT AND LITERACY

Practitioners agreed that while the immediate task of any advertising was "getting noticed", and the ultimate purpose was increasing sales, individual ads and campaigns could only be evaluated against their particular objectives. While these were often expressed in terms of brand awareness or attitudes, consumers' attitudes to the ads themselves were also considered important. It was suggested that this reflects the industry's need to believe that it worked by

> ...striking up a relationship between the consumer and the advertising, and, you hope, eventually, the product. [advertising agency]

Otherwise, it was suggested, shifting brand image and attitudes would be impossible. One consequence of consumers' increased sophistication was thought to be their expectation of a good advertising "product". Indeed, if consumers considered an ad to be entertaining or expensive, it was suggested that they may have more respect for the brand, because the advertiser was seen to care about it and have enough faith in the brand to support it financially. Furthermore, if consumers could "see themselves" in an ad or aspire to the lifestyle portrayed in it, there was thought to be

> ...a very strong link between that and actually wanting a piece of the brand. And the two feed off each other because the product imparts back the advertising. [advertising agency]

Thus, advertising was thought to help build a relationship between consumers and brands through images and emotional appeals. Like the songs and films from which it often draws, advertising was thought to be "all about potent imagery that we often can't express or articulate". Symbolic or emotional desires were thought to form a large part of consumer decisions, regardless of the extent to which consumers realised or admitted this. Thus,

> ...what the consumer does is imbue products, and we help them imbue products, with brand values... [advertising agency]

The danger from the advertiser's point of view, however, was that consumers would divorce entertainment value from persuasive attempts. Thus, consumers in the target market could enjoy and appreciate an ad, but resist buying the brand. This may be because another brand was considered functionally superior, or even because the ad's imagery, while enjoyable, did not reflect consumers' self-image or aspirations. Other consumers were thought to happily "consume" particular ads, even if they were not in the market for the product: for example, many non-smokers were thought to enjoy the ads for Hamlet cigars. While the consumption of advertising images by those outside the target market in such cases was not considered problematic, some concern was expressed about those excluded for economic reasons:

> The phenomenon of advertising is based on the premise that we're allowed to have fantasies and that there is some hope of those people realising these fantasies...now a lot of people haven't got a hope in hell of improving their lives. [advertising agency]

Thus, researching "consumers" who lack any sort of disposable income was disturbing, precisely because those fantasies were so completely inaccessible to them. Their lack of economic power undoubtedly excluded them from the target market for many brands, although they were exposed to a wide range of ads. Once again, this suggests that Advertising Association (1992) may be too complacent in dismissing concerns that "the unemployed must find advertising particularly annoying".

While good ads could gain respect for their brands, those failing to "get it right stylistically" for the target audience could lead to the brand not being taken seriously. Indeed, as consumers become more discriminating, advertisers were thought to be able to "get away with very little" in terms of weak propositions and poor material:

> People's experience of advertising is broader and greater, and so they are building finer filters against...the bullshit part of advertising. [research company]

Naturally, none of this would worry any self-respecting practitioner. Indeed, if consumers appreciated advertising, rather than taking it for granted, this would presumably increase practitioners' sense of professional satisfaction. However, there was also "that great fear, that not all advertising produces a beneficial result". Thus, ads may actually "turn people off", destroy their confidence in a brand, or attack the very reason they were buying it. For example, in some cases, television advertising was thought to destroy a brand's "cult" status, because

> ...people like to feel that they're almost a member of some exclusive club, that they've discovered something themselves. [research company]

If consumers disliked an ad, several consequences were suggested, the most extreme being that the brand would be avoided. While researchers sometimes found this to be the case, at least in terms of claimed behaviour, brands lacking distinct product benefits were thought to be most vulnerable: it was suggested that poor ads would not be too damaging if consumers had other reasons for buying a brand. Furthermore, consumers' dislike of a campaign was sometimes thought to be the price to be paid for its "impact" and "effectiveness" on other criteria. For example, one practitioner was not worried that a particular campaign received a great deal of criticism, as

> ...it is definitely very noticeable and it's getting its message home, the advertiser's identity and what sort of points they want to make... [research company]

There was also the suggestion - or hope - that while people may not bother trying to understand something which they disliked, sophisticated consumers would appreciate what disliked campaigns were trying to do. Again, it would be very reassuring for practitioners if they could believe this. Just as patients accept unpleasant medicine from a doctor, it would be nice for advertising practitioners if consumers trusted their professional judgment enough to accept ads which they did not like.

So far, it seems that the practitioners welcomed the advent of advertising literate consumers. In a sense, it made the task of advertising research easier, as consumers were more willing to take advertising seriously, get involved and discuss what particular ads were trying to achieve. This was no doubt gratifying for those in the industry. However, the advertising literate consumer was not welcomed wholeheartedly by the practitioners. Some concern was expressed that consumers could use their knowledge and "professional" vocabulary to distance themselves from ads which they were shown in research:

> ...they put up their shields and talk to you about "it's designed to do this thing and that". And you say "does it work?" and they say "of course not, we know what it's trying to do". [research company]

This is similar to Ryan's (1990) point about the need to distinguish between consumers' cynical acknowledgment of accurate targeting and a natural affinity with ads. Furthermore, there were concerns that consumers' growing sophistication undermined the value of advertising by taking away its magic and mystique. Indeed,

magicians could probably empathise with practitioners in this respect, as they too may feel torn between demonstrating their "tricks" to an audience and employing them on it. In any case, the practitioners agreed that consumers had become more self-conscious and deliberate in their response: they understood that ads were "pitched" at them, and they could choose to respond positively or negatively, or even with cynicism or resentment at attempts to "manipulate" them.

7. CONCLUSIONS

These interviews provided some insight into consumers' attitudes, involvement and literacy with respect to advertising. They indicated that such issues could be explored in a qualitative manner, and that findings could be compared with the literature reviewed earlier.

In particular, this preliminary research reinforced the literature's emphasis on the complexity and contradictions of consumers' attitudes to advertising. It suggested that consumers' increasing affinity with and enjoyment of advertising was combined with a strong sense of cynicism and a denial of its effects. It also indicated the intertextual nature of advertising experiences, providing examples of the leaky boundaries between it and other communication forms. Consumers emerged from this phase of the research as increasingly sophisticated in their dealings with ads, possessing a specialist vocabulary, aware of different advertising objectives and approaches, and understanding the "rules" of the advertising game. As a result, they appeared to be increasingly discerning and demanding with respect to advertising, and made inferences about brands and manufacturers from the perceived quality of ads. Less welcome to the practitioners was the possibility that consumers' advertising literacy would enable them to distance themselves from advertising and its mystique.

The practitioner interviews also indicated that consumers could be involved with ads and advertising as well as with products and brands. Advertising involvement was described in terms of an active and often emotional response, particularly to the situation, images or characters in an ad. The consequences of such involvement were thought to include consumers staying to watch the ads during a commercial break, discussing them with others, and even developing closer relationships with the advertised brands: in some cases, consumers' affinity with the advertising may be the brand's competitive advantage.

While practitioners' views were helpful in suggesting areas to explore in greater depth with consumers in the next phase of the project, those in the advertising industry are hardly disinterested commentators on consumer's relationship with advertising. Therefore, it was important to understand the practitioners' perspective and concerns, and to examine how this may have affected their accounts of consumers' response to ads. Indeed, practitioners' relationships with consumers appeared to be as ambivalent as consumers' attitudes to advertising. On the one hand, they professed a great affinity with consumers, as they also saw themselves as consumers. For example, one practitioner observed that

> I go to the cinema a lot, and part of me is certainly there as a consumer, part of me is there just to see how people behave and react. [advertising agency]

The identification with consumers also appeared to be based on contact with them through research. During the interviews for this project, the practitioners frequently, and without exception, took the role of "the punter", putting words into his or her mouth. For example, someone suggested

> They don't like being spoken down to - "I understand that, don't make it so simple". [advertising agency]

Despite considering themselves aligned with consumers, the practitioners seemed to maintain a professional distance. They demonstrated a strong sense of themselves as professionals, referring frequently to the specialist knowledge, skills and judgment which they exercised for the benefit of their clients, and to the regulation of their activities by codes of conduct as well as by law. They valued clients' trust and appreciation as well as their business, and it seemed important that their industry was respected by the public.

On various occasions, however, the practitioners seemed to lose both their professional stance and their identification with consumers. Their frequent use of the term "punter", for example, suggested a disparaging attitude towards consumers. It was also suggested that gaining consumers' involvement with ads was a way of "getting under their defenses". This again suggests that practitioners do not necessarily align themselves with consumers.

Finally, the practitioners seemed unsure as to whether consumers were active participants in the creation of ad meanings, or passive receivers of given advertising messages. This active/passive conflict was evident throughout practitioners' discussion of consumers' response to ads. For example, they discussed consumers'

growing affinity with advertising, their understanding of advertising controls, and their appreciation of ads as an art form. They described consumers' advertising involvement in terms of an active response to ads, and discussed their sophisticated interpretations of ads and advertising strategies. This all presents a picture of an active, confident, and competent advertising consumer. Ironically, consumers were given little credit for any of it. Their growing literacy and affinity with advertisers were thought to have developed almost by default, as a by-product of the advertising industry's sophistication, and the high standard of many ads. Similarly, advertising involvement was seen as largely media- and advertising-led, rather than a reflection of the active nature of consumers' dealings with ads. Furthermore, there were numerous references to ads "pulling" consumers in to them, "making" them involved or entertained, and "moving them on" in their attitudes to brands. There was even discussion of "triggers that should be pulled" in order to "make" consumers respond in particular ways.

Thus, practitioners see consumers as ambivalent in their attitude towards advertising, and practitioners themselves have conflicting beliefs about the way in which consumers relate to advertising. At times, the relationship between consumers and practitioners seemed collusive. This was the case when both parties favoured the use of humour and imagery, for example: the sophisticated consumer could appreciate the advertising industry's effort and skill, and both parties could enjoy the extra layers of detail or meaning provided in "ads as art form". At other times, however, the interests of consumers and practitioners appear to collide. Thus, while they appeared to welcome it, the practitioners also seemed quite threatened by the "punter's" advertising literacy. Consumers who understood and appreciated advertising methods and techniques may effectively remove themselves from advertising's circle of influence: magic no longer "works" when we know how the tricks are performed.

In summary, practitioners' views of advertising consumers appear to have been filtered through their own agendas concerning power and professionalism. Thus, while their ideas about the ways in which consumers experience advertising suggest areas for exploration, it is to consumers themselves that we must turn for greater understanding.

PART THREE:

THE MAIN STUDY

CHAPTER SEVEN

ADVERTISING LITERACY SKILLS

According to the literature reviewed in Chapter Four, advertising literacy comprises an ability to make brand inferences from cues within ads, a specialist vocabulary, and an awareness of various advertising objectives, conventions, approaches, and production techniques.

On these criteria, the young adults interviewed in this study certainly emerged as advertising literate. Their comments, descriptions and interpretations indicated a sophisticated understanding which went considerably beyond that mentioned in the literature or by the practitioners interviewed earlier. Three dimensions of young adults' advertising literacy were identified. Firstly, they showed themselves to be confident and competent consumers of advertising, capable of decoding complex messages and drawing on knowledge of various advertising conventions, styles and trends. Secondly, they offered plausible performances in the role of advertising strategists. Using a specialist vocabulary, they discussed the market conditions facing various advertisers, assessed their likely objectives, target audiences and positioning approaches, and commented on the effectiveness of those approaches. Finally, the young adults presented themselves as casual cognoscenti, commenting on advertising costs, technical details and production values, and offering stories and speculation about the making of some commercials.

This chapter examines these three dimensions, comparing them with the concept of advertising literacy as addressed in the literature and the practitioner interviews. The various sources of young adults' advertising literacy are then considered, as are its implications for an understanding of their relationship with advertising.

1. COMPETENT CONSUMERS

The young adults emerged as highly proficient in their role as consumers of advertising. This chapter first examines the ease with which they made sense of

complex visual and verbal language, and their sophisticated appreciation of advertising conventions, styles and trends.

1.1. Ease of decoding complex ads

As Dyer (1982: 115) has pointed out,

> ...the meaning of an advertisement is not something there, statistically inside an ad, waiting to be revealed by a "correct" interpretation.

Thus, there is no point in trying to assess whether informants interpreted various ads "correctly" or even in accordance with what might be seen as the sender's intentions. Rather, what is of interest here is the ease and sophistication with which they made sense of advertising imagery to themselves and each other. Indeed, they expected this of themselves. As a male student put it, "you think you're pretty stupid if you can't understand an advert". Sophisticated decoding skills were particularly evident in discussions of four campaigns, and these are now addressed in turn.

Several female informants were very taken by television and magazine ads for Galaxy Ripple chocolate*, which featured a woman wearing a brown dress and eating the bar. While no-one actually used semiotic terminology, several informants referred to the woman's iconic function in the ad. For example,

> Oh, it's just chocolate put on film. Oh, it's this girl and she's wearing like brown, it actually makes me think of chocolate as well. It's in glossy magazines and so on and it's just got flowing brown clothes, and it's falling into ripples, you know, as in like Galaxy Ripple...
>
> [female students 21-24]

In one group, as they looked through magazines, informants found a Ripple ad containing the line "Why have cotton when you can have silk?" (Figure 7.1.). They were not at a loss to make sense of this:

> See this? That's like saying "Why have a Flake, when you can have a Ripple?".
>
> [female workers 18-20]

In addition to understanding that the woman in the ad represented the Ripple chocolate, this informant inferred a claim that the brand was superior to Flake, despite the lack of a direct reference to a competitor.

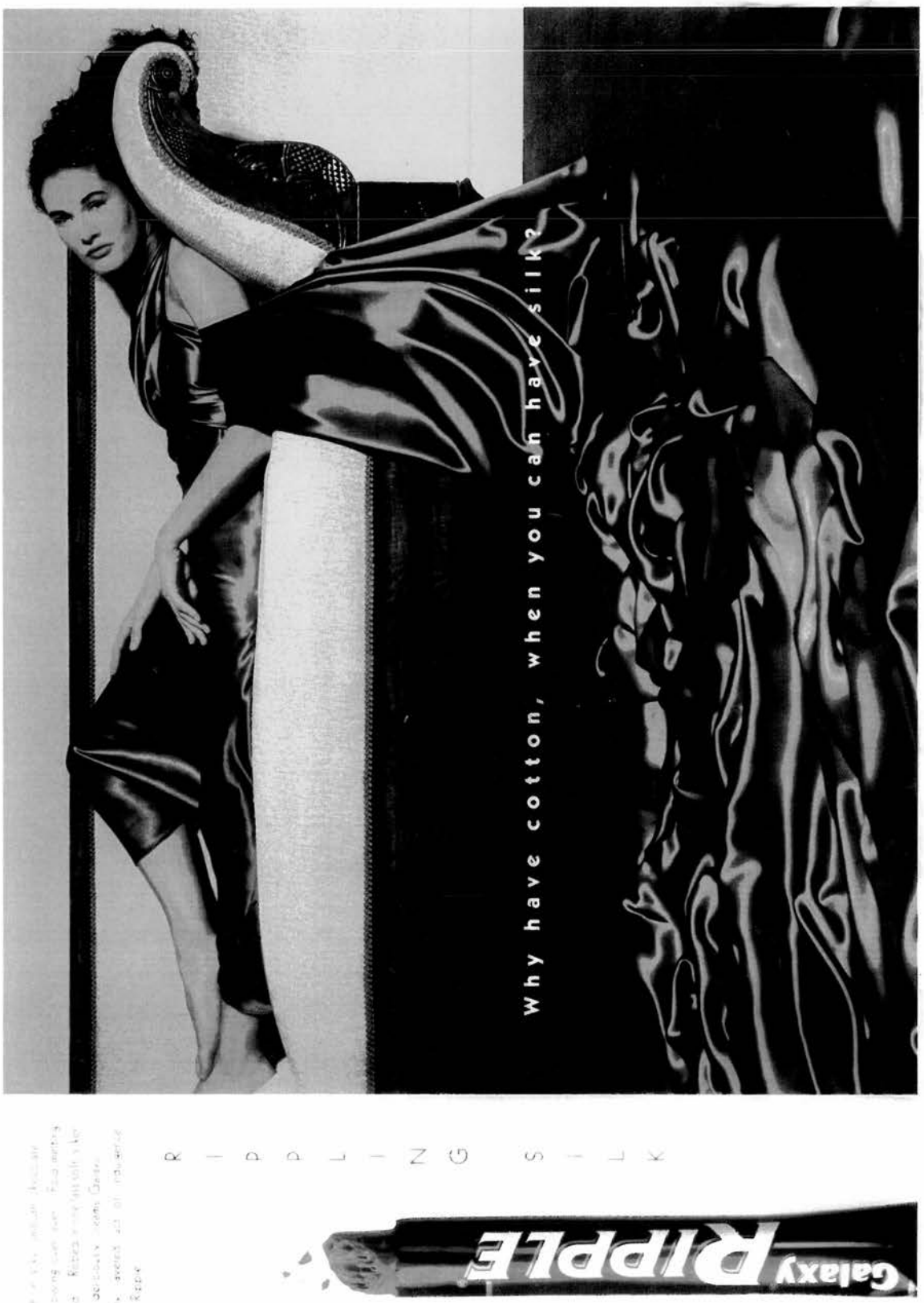


Figure 7.1 Galaxy Ripple ad

A clear facility with advertising imagery was also evident in informants' discussion of the Guinness ads featuring the actor Rutger Hauer*. He was thought to symbolise Guinness in much the same way as the woman represented Galaxy chocolate:

> I think he's supposed to be the personification of a pint of Guinness. Black with blonde hair, sort of the character a pint of Guinness would have or something. [male students 21-24]

Similarly, a young female worker thought that he was "supposed to be the human form of Guinness...he's all about the product". Many others talked about how closely they identified him with Guinness, to the extent that the brand no longer needed to be mentioned in the ads.

> ...if I see the guy in the black jacket with the white hair, I know it's for Guinness.
> [unemployed females 18-20]

For some informants, another layer of significance to his character in the Guinness ads was added by his screen persona in films such as "The Hitcher" (a thriller, in which he played a murderous hitch-hiker) and "Blade Runner" (a science fiction film in which he played a rebel android). Others argued that he did not need such a history to make him appropriate for the ads:

> - I think the guy's unique...just his voice and the clothes he wears.
> - Cool.
> - It's just basically his style. [unemployed males 18-20]
> - I thought he was pretty effective. Cos I wasn't sure who he was. I've seen "The Hitcher", but it didn't strike me.
> - You don't need to, though, do you? Cos he's, he's just got this thing about him.
> - Yeah, he's got presence, that's right... [male workers 21-24, mixed]

In addition to appreciating the various ways in which Rutger Hauer was appropriate for the Guinness ads, many informants had little difficulty in making sense of what actually happened in these ads. For example, the ad which featured the actor as twin brothers was described as follows:

> It's to promote cans of draught Guinness there and one of them's drinking the can of draught Guinness, one of them's drinking a pint. And the one drinking the pint gets some on his nose and goes like that [wiping his nose on his sleeve], really disgusting. And he goes "My brother and me are both identical. Except you can take me anywhere". Like he's supposed to be more sophisticated, plus the fact that you can carry cans of draught Guinness around.
> [male students 18-20]

This informant not only identifies the Hauer character as "the human form of Guinness", but has no difficulty in extending this metaphor so that the twins stand for the two forms of the drink, identical in all respects except that the can is more portable. He appreciates the play on words involved in the line "you can take me

anywhere", making inferences about sophistication and mobility. A similar appreciation of advertising resonance (McQuarrie and Mick 1992) is demonstrated in a description of the "dark glasses" ad* for Guiness:

> They work in black magic and the dark glasses, punchlines and things all related to the Guinness sort of thing...the most recent one, where he's standing in the sunshine and he says something along the lines of "Bright sun, blue skies. The solution: dark glasses".
> [male worker 21-24]

In contrast to these campaigns, which seemed to engage informants, the Silk Cut ads (Figure 7.2.) appeared to be losing their interest. While working out the various magazine and poster ads had once been a challenge, informants had now reduced the campaign to the basic principle and become quite jaded with it:

> The first ones were better. They're obviously running out of ideas. You have limitations to how many times you can cut a bit of silk in a different way. [unemployed females 21-24]

Indeed, some informants had come to know them so well that the vital "silk" cue had been dispensed with or forgotten:

> I find them pretty tedious actually. There's always a purple bit of satin with a cut in it somewhere. [female workers 18-20]

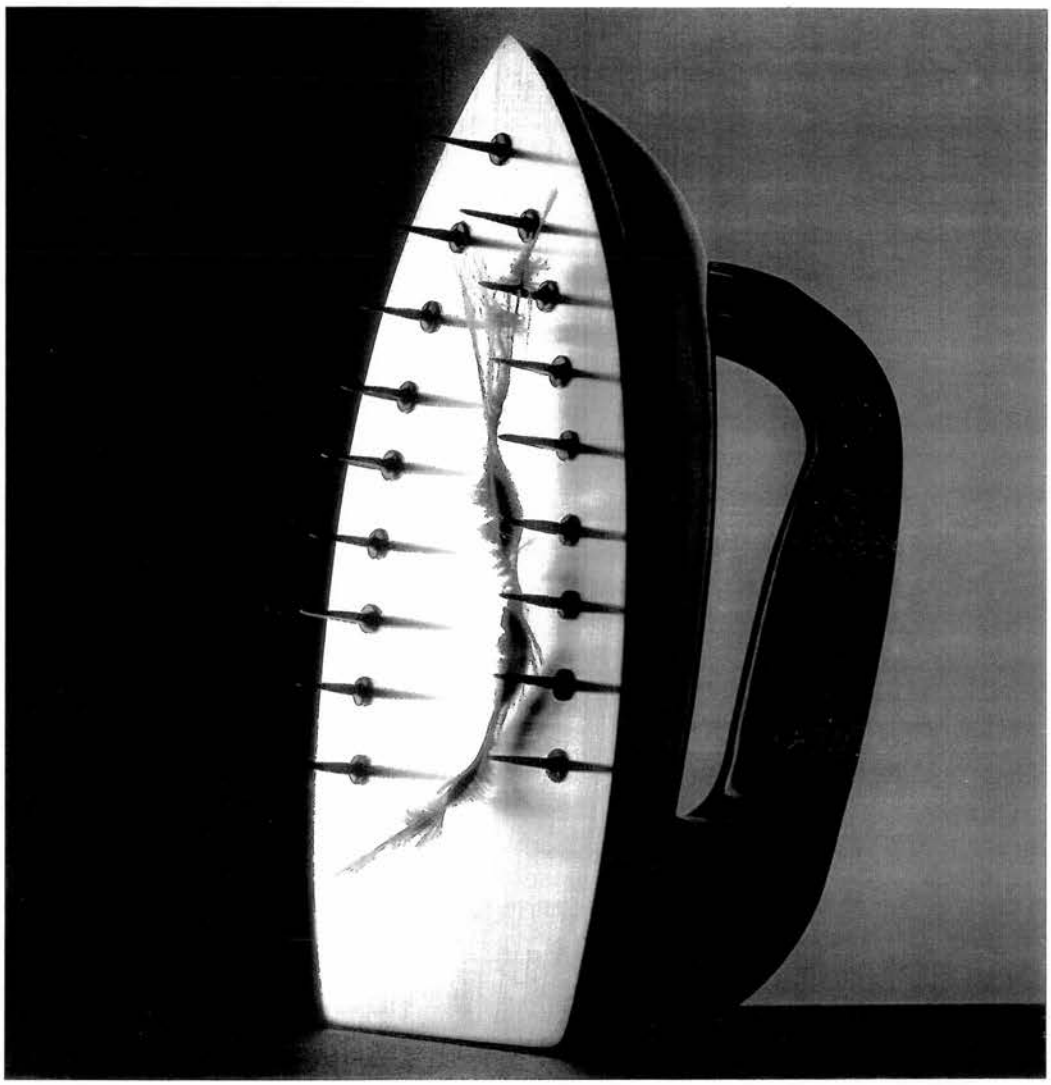
While the Silk Cut campaign was the most widely discussed of the cigarette ads, informants explained how they knew other ads were for Regal King Size or Benson & Hedges (Figure 7.3), despite the "obscure" or "surreal" imagery. Indeed,

> Cigarettes like to use subtlety. They like you to think you're smart by working out who's selling the advert but it's very obvious. [male student 18-20]

They did acknowledge, however, that the imagery was sometimes too "cryptic", so that they relied on additional cues to make sense of them. Thus, several informants found the Government health warning invaluable:

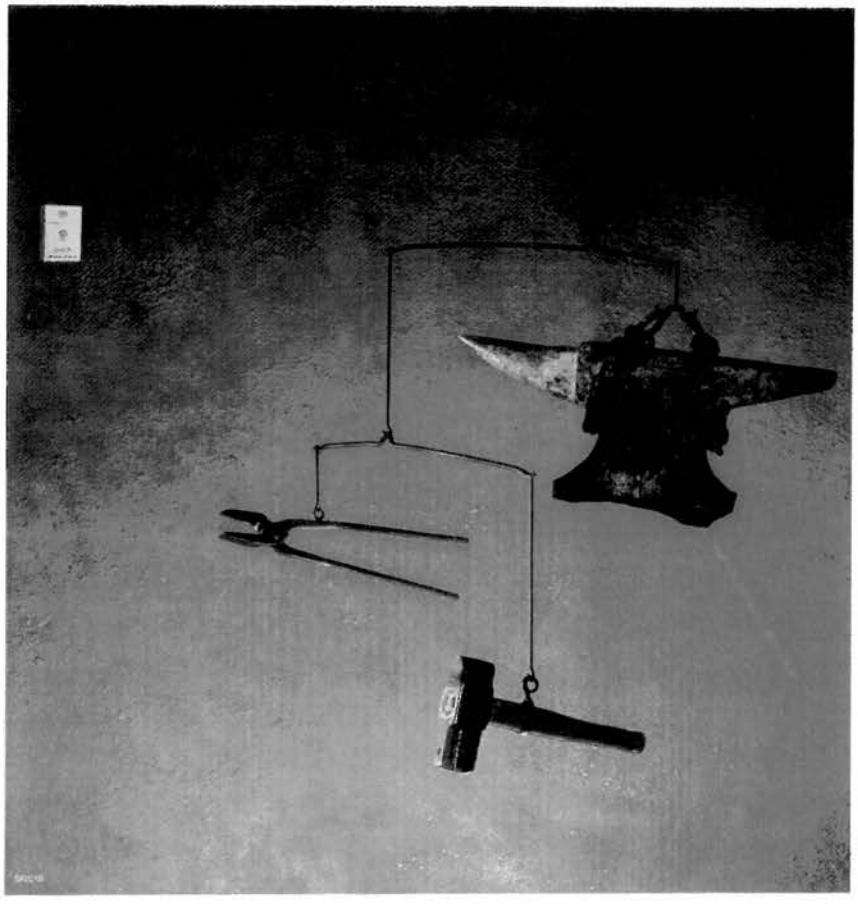
> The only way you can tell what they're advertising is because of the Government health warning at the bottom of it. [male workers 21-24]

Such comments, while no doubt distressing the Surgeon-General, support the idea of active audiences, using message elements for their own ends rather than for the purpose intended by the sender.



LOW TAR As defined by H.M. Government
Warning: MORE THAN 30,000 PEOPLE DIE EACH YEAR
IN THE UK FROM LUNG CANCER
Health Departments' Chief Medical Officers

Figure 7.2. Silk Cut ad



MIDDLE TAR As defined by H.M. Government
Warning: SMOKING CAN CAUSE FATAL DISEASES
Health Departments' Chief Medical Officers

Figure 7.3.Benson & Hedges ad

Ads for McEwan's lager were also discussed in some detail. As one informant noted, these varied from the amusing to those involving "deep thought". It was the "deep thought" ads, with their highly complex imagery, which generated most discussion. One of these* featured a ragged group of men struggling to push heavy boulders up a ramp, only to have them roll down again. This was then presented as a scene from a video shown in a bar. The men peered out from the screen at those in the bar, and used a boulder to smash through the screen and grab a pint of McEwan's. This ad had intrigued one of the practitioners interviewed earlier: he was convinced that it said something deep and meaningful, which somehow he could not quite grasp. Similarly,

> The McEwan's advert from a couple of years ago. Where they push the ball up the hill. It's actually part of a - I don't know if it's somebody's philosophy or something. It's supposed to be like hell where they push the stone ball up the hill and then it drops all the way to the bottom and they have to start again. [female student 18-20]

While someone else thought that "nobody understands one word of what they mean", others arrived at more prosaic interpretations of this ad:

> It's meant to be, you know, drink McEwan's lager and escape from the rat race.
> [female students 21-24]

> It's like sitting there in the office or somewhere, go to the pub in half an hour, end of the day.
> [male workers 21-24, mixed]

Another "deep thought" McEwan's ad*, filmed in black and white, showed a man leaving an industrial site at the end of a shift. He was then shown drinking a can of McEwan's and the scene changed, showing icebergs and birds, with a beautiful woman and some haunting music in the background. Some dismissed this as "boring" or "pointless", but others disagreed:

> - With the McEwan's one, the glacier, all the ice. Maybe to show power or something. It's just above me.
> - It's like in the Arctic, it's so pure, and the water's so cool.
> - That's what I was thinking as well. It shows you like major forces moving and things, and the birds.
> - It's like freedom, high up in the sky and all the steam comes out. Releasing, relaxing. It's a great advert. [male students 18-20]

Given the practitioners' concerns about hothousing, it could be argued that such detailed interpretations say more about the research context than informants' everyday relationships with ads. Even if this were so, the above conversation demonstrates informants' facility with advertising imagery. However, it did not arise

from forced exposure to the ad in question: it was based on the sense informants made of an ad which they themselves remembered and chose to discuss.

1.2. Awareness of advertising conventions

According to Gordon (1982), Lannon (1985) and the practitioners interviewed earlier, consumers are aware of the "ground rules" of advertising. The young adults' interpretations of advertising images indicate awareness of conventions such as the use of people to symbolise brands. They also knew what to expect of advertising in other respects. Some of their comments in this context were quite mundane, referring to the same ad appearing simultaneously in various magazines for example. They also offered more insightful observations on content and media conventions.

Turning first to content conventions, advertising in general was expected to exaggerate:

> Everything's brilliant, eh? There's nothing wrong with anything. [unemployed females 18-20]

Informants also had clear ideas of what was appropriate in ads for particular products or brands. Thus, ads for Levi's jeans invariably featured "classic" music and "the best-looking, perfect males". Washing-up liquid ads were always situated "in the kitchen and all that sort of stuff", and while black and white photography in a clothing ad might be "quite stylish and effective", it "wouldn't be very good" for food products.

A number of informants talked about the conventional colour-coding of car advertising. Car ads in general were thought to feature a disproportionate number of red cars,

> ...because red catches your attention, doesn't it? You'd rather look at a red car than a black car. [unemployed females 21-24]

Thus, when an ad featured a car in another colour, it had to be explained. For example, Lotus cars were shown in yellow, and this was thought to be in order to differentiate them from the "fast car" image of Ferarri. Volvo ads tended to show blue cars to distance them from the "sports car" image, although a new model was shown in red to "draw attention to the sleek look".

As we have seen earlier, the informant who interpreted the cotton/silk comparison in the Ripple ad as an attack on Flake appeared to have well-developed antennae for

comparative advertising. Indeed, informants generally expected this to be indirect. For example, several people mentioned that Coke and Pepsi never referred to each other by name. Similarly, washing powder ads "never say who their opponent is", and while they may refer to "Brand X", "you know exactly who it is".

> Each company's got a different slogan. They're trying to say "We're better than so-and-so" without mentioning them. [male worker 18-20]

Another aspect of young adults' knowledge related to the use of voiceovers in ads. In the first place, informants recognised that some people, like Terry Wogan or Willie Rushden, "do loads of voiceovers". There were also references to the dubbing of voices in ads from elsewhere:

> - I've seen this one advert for Grecian 2000 in about four different countries with different accents and voices.
> - They do that in Britain for some adverts, they put a regional accent on.
>
> [male students 21-24]

In terms of media conventions, informants were generally aware that some products were not advertised in certain media. Some thought that cigarette advertising was "seldom" rather than never on television. This may be explained by the "phantom attribution" phenomenon mentioned by one of the practitioners: as television is the dominant medium, people may attribute ads from other media to television. There was also some confusion over the type of alcohol advertised on television:

> - They don't have cigarettes, it's just cigars they have. Do they do hard drink as well, you know like spirits?
> - I don't think so.
> - Smirnoff, that's not on TV, it's just on billboards. [unemployed females 21-24]

Informants also knew when and where to expect certain ads. Thus, Silk Cut ads tended to be on the back page of magazines, Black & Decker mainly advertised over Christmas, an ad for a kitchen gadget was shown during the day, and local television ads tended to appear as the last spot in a commercial break or in the middle of the night. Indeed, it was suggested that people could tell what time of day it was by the ads.

Although one informant referred to a "five minute advert", and another suggested that "most adverts are on for a minute or more", perhaps they were expressing how long they felt: someone else suggested that while commercial breaks were not very long, "it just seems that way". Ads were generally described as being less than a minute:

Adverts are so quick nowadays as well, 30 seconds if you're lucky.
[unemployed females 18-20]

It's so short a time between the film you're watching, they're trying to cram it in without you walking away from it. [unemployed males 18-20]

While 15 or 30 seconds were thought to provide the norm, other lengths were identified. Thus, local advertisers were described as placing "blip" ads lasting for a few seconds, while McEwan's ads were cited by several informants as lasting longer than normal. Others referred to the practice of advertisers starting out with a longer ad, and then using edited versions later on. Also indicating an awareness of the use of space between programmes, one informant thought that

...quite recently Channel 4 has been short of advertising, because quite a few times I've seen just like "Coming shortly" and a bit of music. [male students 21-24]

1.3. Awareness of advertising types or styles

The practitioners had suggested that consumers were aware of a "spectrum of different kinds of ads". This was certainly the case among the young adults. Indeed, the breadth and depth of their categorisations exceeded the expectations established by Gordon's (1982) study or the Boston University framework (Bichan et al 1982).

While informants occasionally categorised ads according to the products which they featured, this was usually to elaborate on previously mentioned categories. For example, discussing music in ads, one informant suggested that "car adverts" always used music, and another described how "classic" music was used in ads for beer and jeans, but not for washing powder. In fact, washing powder ads were often referred to as a distinctive style of advertising. They were described as "home-oriented adverts", "patronising", "so predictable", and even part of

...the washing machine genre...this really low key, insulting advertisement technique.
[male graduate workers 21-24]

Some advertising types or styles were described in isolation, while others were immediately compared to their opposites. Many categories were based on advertising approaches and executions, but they also referred to borderline cases, and to the origins of ads. The main categories identified by informants, and the distinctions made within them, are discussed below.

1.3.1. Borderline ads

In some cases, informants expressed uncertainty about whether something they talked about was actually an ad. For example, there was some discussion about whether "fliers", magazine inserts or even branded ashtrays counted as ads. Informants also mentioned "adverts that don't actually sell anything". For example, someone was puzzled by an ad inviting companies to set up in the Livingston area:

> It's not a product and it isn't an appeal for anything in particular...it's not a health warning. It isn't for your own good. That's just a promotion really. It's not an advert.
> [unemployed female 18-20]

Ads for products where there was effectively a monopoly, such as British Telecom or British Gas, were also categorised as "not selling anything", as was corporate advertising:

> There's the likes of the ICI ads...just saying "we're here and this is what we're doing". Maybe looking for - I don't know - investors or company loyalty or whatever. But they don't appear to be offering anything in their ads, if that's what you call them. [male worker 21-24]

Despite the uncertainty which this informant expresses, his analysis is infinitely more sophisticated than that suggested by the practitioner who thought that consumers might understand corporate ads if they were made "fairly clear".

Informants also expressed some uncertainty in classifying health or social education ads, such as those concerning Aids, drink-driving, smoking, or animal cruelty. These were described as "appeals", "warnings", or "public information films". As an unemployed female informant put it, they were "beneficial adverts to all different sorts of people", rather than "for the benefit of the people who make them and sell them". Similarly,

> They've got that kind of serious side to advertising, to get a message across as well as trying to sell something. [male workers 18-20]

Finally, several informants referred to "adverts advertising adverts", and were not always convinced that these were proper ads:

> I find it a wee bit pathetic when they advertise an advertisement, you know. With Rod and Tina Turner all you got was "Watch this space at eight o'clock on Thursday" so that this ad for Pepsi Cola came up. [female workers 18-20]

1.3.2. Ad origins

In describing or commenting on ads, informants sometimes referred to where they were made. Local and regional ads were frequently mentioned as a distinct category:

> It's quite nice to see local, you know, regional adverts on telly like that. Cos you know a lot of Persil ones are all sort of London-based... [male graduate workers 21-24]

Local ads tended to be associated with cinemas, poor quality and low budgets. The terms "local" and "regional" were often used interchangeably, but some informants referred to national ads which had been dubbed into local or regional accents as "regional".

"Scottish" ads were also discussed as a distinct category. Informants generally considered an ad for a Scottish product a Scottish ad. While there was some expectation that these ads would be produced in Scotland, a few people, referring to an ad for the soft drink Irn-Bru as one of the best Scottish ones, also commented that they "had probably been made in England". Indeed, Irn-Bru's advertising agency at the time was London-based Lowe-Howard-Spink. In general, informants could not think of many other Scottish ads beyond those for beer or newspapers. Some Scottish ads were thought to be explicitly "patriotic", such as the Scottish Blend tea ads which had kettles whistling to the tune of "Auld Lang Syne". Others were "trying to be too Scottish", such as those for the Daily Record newspaper which claimed that "real Scots read the Record".

Scottish ads were often discussed in relation to English ones. Here informants demonstrated a mixture of national self-deprecation and defense of the underdog. They thought that Scottish ads were generally inferior to English ones, but accounted for this on financial grounds. Thus, two female graduate workers discussed a Scottish ad which had not impressed them. One suggested that the advertisers "couldn't afford anybody nice", and the other chipped in with "couldn't afford an English person!". A similar theme ran through another informant's comments:

> You would maybe look at it and say well, you can tell it's Scottish because not as much money has been spent on it as the English would spend on it. [unemployed males 21-24]

In another group, it was recognised that some English ads were also low-budget, but this was seen to be relative, as "there's more affluence down there". In terms of content rather than budget, there was little discussion of English ads. However, some male students referred to "English ads taking the piss out of Scotland", and others

talked about ads which were "all the time very English".

Informants also categorised some ads as "American". This label covered several different styles of advertising. Firstly, based on visits to America, or American ads which they had seen on British television programmes, informants described "American" advertising as aggressive and very direct:

> American adverts are quite hard sell. They really sort of quite pressurise you to buy, the guy keeps going on and on...It's not like Europe. [male workers 21-24, mixed]

In a similar vein, there were references to American ads "slagging off" competitors directly, and telling consumers to "dial with your Access card and buy!", or "buy this or your money back!"

Another "American" style of advertising had more to do with the imagery of ads for all-American products such as Coke and Pepsi. An unemployed informant described some ads as "Americanised...young, trendy". Many references were made to the young, glamorous American teenagers, and the American rock and pop music used in such ads. In this context it is perhaps not surprising that several informants considered the Levi's ads to be American. While the American origins of the product may influence perception of the ads, one informant commented:

> I know they're not really American, but it's just the heat and everyone has got these dresses that are really low cut and sort of lying back in the sun and watching whoever it is going past, this gorgeous girl or gorgeous guy in their gorgeous jeans. [female students 18-20]

More surprising was the belief among some informants that ads for Volkswagen and Hamlet were American. Here the products themselves did not have an American image, and the ads did not show "young, trendy" people. Perhaps the sheer production quality of these ads was equated with America. Informants sometimes assumed ads to be Scottish rather than English because of apparently lower budgets. If America is considered a more affluent country than Britain, American ads could be expected to have higher budgets and thus be able to afford higher standards of production.

Finally, it is interesting to note that informants rarely categorised ads as "European", although there were one or two references to ads according to specific European countries. While this presumably reflects the dominance of British and American ads on their television screens, there have been some ads (such as the Renault Clio campaign) which could have fallen into such a category. Furthermore, most of this research took place just months before 1992. While that date was symbolic rather

than bringing many real changes, the Single European Market was still fast approaching. In this context, these young Scots' discussions about advertising may indicate a general use of England and America, rather than the rest of Europe, as points of reference.

1.3.3. Ad approaches

Informants commonly identified a wide range of advertising approaches. For example, there were references to " a lifestyle type of advert" usually in terms of aspirational images:

> ...you know, you too can drive out at dawn and be cheered up by making yourself a cup of coffee... [female student 21-24]

Many informants distinguished between "one-off" ads which did not build on plot, themes or characters, and "serial" or "follow-up" ads. For example, the Gold Blend ads* were frequently described as a "wee mini-series", whose audience wished to find out what would happen next.

Emotional ads, or those "playing on your emotions" were described as a category by some informants. For example,

> Emotional adverts. British Telecom ones, getting in touch with all the family you haven't seen for a while. [male worker 18-20]

Emotional appeals were associated with "hard-hitting" ads such as those bringing home the consequences of drink-driving. However, there was little discussion of this as an approach: when emotion was discussed, it seemed to be treated as a property of informants' own response to ads or ad elements, rather than as a basis for categorising ads.

While other categories, such as "cartoons" or "animations" were identified, those discussed in most detail related to direct and indirect approaches, and the use of humour, celebrities, music and stereotypes. These categorisations are examined below.

1.3.3.1. Direct versus indirect approaches

Informants frequently compared "direct" or "straightforward" ads with those which were "indirect", "subtle", or "obscure". Thus,

It seems they either do the totally direct approach and shove the product in your face, or they do something totally obscure and arty with maybe just a mention of the product.
[male students 18-20]

A direct ad "gets straight to the point", "hits you all at once", and "spells out what you're supposed to learn", by demonstrating the product or providing information on what it can do:

They usually come on, they've got this feature and that's you, sort of thing.
[male workers 21-24, mixed]

As this comment indicates, informative advertising was seen as part of the direct approach. However, one graduate worker made some distinctions within this category, suggesting that ads may be "informative, actually tell you facts", "informative interesting", and "informative to make you buy". There were some suggestions that advertising should be completely direct. Indeed, someone thought this was so obvious that the current situation must result from pressure exerted on advertisers:

I don't think they can do that. They can't say "buy this product". I think that's right, I think I read that somewhere. You can't actually do that - straightforward, "buy this product".
[male workers 21-24]

In contrast to direct ads were those where it was "not always obvious what they're selling", in that they did not mention the brand name, show the product or explain what it did. Instead, they offered

...something slightly different, like there's something to work out, a bit more complex than "buy this, buy that". [male students 21-24]

Various indirect approaches were identified. Firstly, "image" ads or "general image builders" were mentioned, and often described as "subtle". These referred to ads whose images were not directly related to the brand.

The McEwan's one...it's more sort of elitist style of advertising. They're trying to build up this mysterious image about it...the images that the advert produces aren't directly, you can't relate them directly to the beer... [male workers 21-24, mixed]

Sometimes "image" ads on television simply refrained from identifying the brand at the start:

You don't really know what they're on about until the end. Just a wee picture and that's it.
[unemployed males 18-20]

Other informants identified advertising campaigns which withheld the brand identity

for several executions. Billboard campaigns were frequently mentioned in this respect. For example, one was described as

> ...the same sort of technique as the Wispa campaign, you know when that came out and nobody knew what it was for cos they had these kind of trailer ones. [female students 21-24]

In this context, a number of informants referred to teaser posters in bus shelters, placed by the outdoor advertising industry to demonstrate that people paid attention or were influenced by outdoor advertising:

> - Why do they put up these poster adverts that say nothing? Is that for research into advertisements? The little girl ones...was that what it was for?
> - I'm sure I heard it was just to make you..to see how many people take note of bus shelter adverts. [unemployed females 21-24]

In other cases, even knowing the identity of the advertised brand did not help greatly, as the imagery itself was "weird", "dead strange", "like some cult film", or "surreal":

> They create an image for a product and you can sort of take it to the limit, like the cigarette adverts. [male students 21-24]

Such ads were described as "abstract", "cryptic", "complicated", or "hard to understand", and again were strongly associated with billboards. Some of these ads were thought to take the element of mystery too far, and were described as "ludicrously abstract" or "trying to be too sort of clever, too arty, too subtle". As one informant observed,

> The supposedly surrealist ones are getting really really ridiculous. [male students 21-24]

1.3.3.2. Celebrity ads

There was much discussion of ads with "famous people", "stars", or "fairly famous names". Some of these ads were simply thought of as offering familiarity through the use of known voices, faces or characters.

> I think it does make a difference if it's somebody well-known that's actually doing the adverts. [female workers 21-24]

However, informants' categorisation of celebrity ads was much more complex than this. In addition to the distinction commonly made between celebrities who were liked and those who were not, one informant suggested three categories of famous people used in ads:

...somebody very topical, for example a comedian who's very much in vogue doing something in his style or her style... sometimes they'll put in people who seem very out of place in an advert, like Derek Hatton advertising watches...you get people that are washed out, like the soap one. And it's Dana who's in it, an Irish singer of the Seventies. [male students 21-24]

These themes were evident in many other informants' comments. Thus, while a certain logic may be argued for using a "washed out" singer in an ad for soap, there was a general sense of some "minor celebrities" or those who were perhaps past their sell-by date, appearing in various ads to supplement their dwindling income.

I guess quite often people feel "they must be a bit short of money if they're returning to adverts now". [female student 18-20]

The most commonly cited example of "has been" endorsers was the use of Dougie Donnelly in ads for Sterling furniture*. As one informant put it, "the 'celebrity' isn't a celebrity". Although at the time of writing, Dougie Donnelly still presents Scottish sports programmes, he was described by several people as someone who "used to be a sports presenter". He was also considered "pathetic" and "boring" partly because of his "squeaky voice", a tendency towards V-necked jumpers and "nicely brushed hair".

He's just not the most charismatic sort of person...He's straight, he's boring...the way he expresses himself it's very sort of monotone, you know, and he's just a boring image. He's boring hair, boring face. Bland. Bland as anything. [unemployed female 21-24]

Some examples of appropriate uses of celebrities were provided, such as ads for Lucozade Sport* which used personalities like the footballer John Barnes:

- I think they're representing, you know, they're full of energy.
- Yeah, I think it's better using actual sportsmen in adverts like that.

[unemployed females 21-24]

However, informants tended to cite more examples of celebrities who did not "fit" with the product which they were advertising, perhaps because they would not normally use it. For example, the appropriateness of the actress Nanette Newman endorsing washing-up liquid was questioned:

What's she doing advertising Fairy? As if she ever washes a dish in her life!

[unemployed females 21-24]

Similarly, a male student suggested that using personalities like Billy Connolly or Jools Holland in low- or non-alcoholic drinks ads was about as credible as "Mick Jagger saying don't do drugs, kids". Other ads were also thought to be wrong in their use of celebrity endorsers. For example, the ads for HP sauce with the boxer Frank

Bruno "didn't work", because there was no logical association with the product. Indeed, the much-maligned Dougie Donnelly was criticised on similar grounds: not only was his background insufficiently illustrious, but it was also considered irrelevant to furniture:

> You used to see him on, presenting the sports, and now he's advertising furniture and all the rest of it. It disnae seem right. [male workers 18-20]

In addition to recognising the need for a fit between celebrities and products, informants were aware of the danger that celebrities could overshadow the product. Thus, while Rutger Hauer's appearance and cool personality suited Guinness, one informant suggested that

> If you think of the Fairy Liquid advert, the first thing you think of is Fairy Liquid, you don't think of whatever her name is that does it. But if you think of the Guinness advert, you think of Rutger Hauer and you think of the advert rather than the actual Guinness. [male students 18-20]

There was more consensus that celebrities overshadowed the brand in Coke and Pepsi ads. Informants attributed this to the similar formats, the sheer stature of the stars involved, and the media coverage of appearance fees.

> Coca-Cola adverts...they put a lot of money in theirs and that like, and get the stars like Gloria Estefan, Michael Jackson... [male workers 18-20]

This comment certainly illustrates the lack of linking, as Michael Jackson was sponsored by Pepsi at the time! A further factor mitigating against links between stars and the brands was thought to be that talent was rarely harnessed in a relevant way:

> See the only one I can ever remember singing a record about the drink was Tina Turner's one for Pepsi. I mean what's "Like a Prayer" from Madonna got to do with Pepsi or Coke? It's just cos she was who she was, that's why she was advertising the drink.[male workers 21-24, mixed]

1.3.3.3. Humorous ads

Humour in advertising was also discussed in some detail. Many informants talked about "comedy ads", which featured established comedians endorsing a product or performing in mini "sketches" or "sit-coms". While these may be funny in their own right, much of the humour was derived from the comedians themselves. However, a distinction was made between ads where the comedians "stick to their own style of comedy" and those where they did not. For example, Russ Abbott was considered to remain in character for the Castella cigar ads where he found devious ways of

making life easier for himself, while Billy Connoly's endorsements for Kaliber low-alcohol lager were thought to present him in unusually subdued form.

Another common distinction was between "quite amusing" and "hilarious" ads. Thus, some were classed as "entertaining", "fairly light-hearted", and using an "easy type of humour" which "cheers you up" or "brings a smile" to the face. Others were described as "really" or "hysterically" funny. The ads which informants cited in this respect tended to rely on visual humour, where the audience was invited to laugh at someone's misfortunes:

> There was an advert on during the World Cup, I think it was for Hamlet cigars. The footballer hit the wall, the ball goes to the crossbar and hits him [laughter]. I remember thinking "Oh my God, that's really funny, I need to tell someone at work". [male workers 21-24 mixed]

> All home videos...of people falling flat on their face and getting pecked by ducks and things. It's really funny. [female students 21-24]

Among some informants, however, there was a thin line between such ads being hilarious and being silly or even stupid. Thus, someone thought that Hamlet advertising had gone though a silly phrase, "with chest wigs and things". In contrast to such visual humour, informants mentioned other ads which were funny due to their verbal content. Thus they spoke of "waiting for the punchline", and of the "wee jokes" or "good lines", in some ads, which were perhaps "playing on words". Such ads were more likely to be described as "subtle", "quirky, off-beat", or even "lifeless" and "a bit pretentious", than those relying on visual humour.

> I like the Holsten Pils adverts with Jeff Goldblum*...it's so subtle, it's great..."People ask me how I feel: it's a series of nerve impulses". You know, that kind of thing.
> [female students 18-20]

Another frequently mentioned type of humorous advertising was the "rip-off" or "mickey-take". A male student said that he liked to see "adverts slagging off other adverts". Similarly,

> It's funny when you get an ad like that Gold Blend one but then you get a spoof on it*. Other adverts taking off other adverts...That one sort of pokes fun at Gold Blend.
> [male workers 21-24, mixed]

In this context, an ad for the Royal Bank of Scotland was praised by several for "taking off" youth-oriented bank ads and "turning it all around" by showing a bank manager trying desperately to get onto the same wavelength as young customers by rapping. Irn-Bru* was by far the most frequently discussed "mickey-taking" campaign, however, as informants enjoyed the way in which these ads made fun of

Coke and Pepsi advertising styles:

- I like the Irn-Bru one -
- Oh aye, they're funny.
- Taking the mickey out of the rest of them.
- Taking the mickey out of the Coca-Cola ones.
- Aye, and the Pepsi. [female workers 18-20]

In appreciating parodies of other ads, informants seem comfortable with what Cook (1992) describes as intra-discoursal allusion. They also recognised interdiscoursal allusion, when non-advertising material was parodied. Thus ads for Red Rock cider were described as "done in a sort of detective spoof sort of way", while ads for Tennent's Special* "ripped off" the Blues Brothers film. In the latter case, however, there was some debate concerning whether the beer ads really "ripped-off" the film: several informants thought they were simply carrying on with the characters and putting them in similar situations to those featured in the film.

Harking back to the direct / indirect categorisation, some informants also categorised the humour in ads according to its relevance to the product. While "irrelevant" humour was sometimes enjoyed, there was also a sense that humour which was not related to the brand was not really funny.

Finally, informants distinguished between ads which simply were funny, those which were meant to be but failed, and those which were unintentionally funny. Thus, a male graduate worker talked about "the obscure trying to be funny, there's ones that are funny". Similarly, another informant referred to

> ...adverts that are funny, or that try to be. There are some that try to be funny and fail, drastically. [female students 18-20]

Low-budget cinema and television ads were frequently referred to as unintentionally funny, and as ads to laugh at. One informant described cinema ads as funny, but added that "they're not supposed to be, they're so pathetic". One campaign which defied categorisation in this context was that for Radion* washing powder which used a "home video" style. There was much discussion in several groups about whether or not it was funny, and whether or not it was supposed to be. While some informants interpreted it as a parody of cheap or other washing powder ads, others had different views:

- I suppose Radion is humorous as well. Well, trying to be humorous as well.
- Aye. I dunno whether it is or no. I don't know if it's meant to be humorous or not. [male workers 21-24]
- The Radion one's supposed to be funny, isn't it?

- Yeah.
- I dunno. I never find it funny. [female workers 18-20]

1.3.3.4. Ads using music

Music in ads was also subjected to detailed categorisation. Various kinds of music were discussed, and several roles for music in advertising were identified. The most frequently discussed category of music ad was that using "golden oldies", "famous songs", "lasting hits" or "real classics", such as Levi's "laundrette" ad using Marvin Gaye's "Heard it through the grapevine".*

> There's a certain type they have these old songs...like 1950s, early 1960s music and that's really popular just now with a certain type of advert. [female students 18-20]

Although informants recognised that this music was older than themselves, they still referred to it as having a nostalgia value for them. As several informants explained, they had often heard the tracks before, presented as "classics" on the radio, for example. Such music was thought to suit

> ...a fashion product or a product that is deemed a fashion product...music has always got more to do with fashion and jeans have got more to do with fashion than coffee or tyres...
> [male student 21-24]

"Classic tracks" were particularly associated with the Levi's commercials. Although other advertisers such as Nescafe had "jumped on the bandwagon", it was suggested that "Levi's have all the good songs". Furthermore, the music was considered integral to the ads:

> I suppose the Levi's...it sort of sums up the whole of the advert. The music's the advert.
> [female students 18-20]

Informants also talked about ads which used more contemporary pop or rock music. Here they cited the names of bands such as Big Country, Win, Berlin, Simple Minds, Sham 69 and The Clash. They were aware of two extremes in the use of contemporary music, in that Coca-Cola and Pepsi "paid millions" to have the likes of Madonna perform in their ads, while the Scottish beer companies promoted young Scottish bands by featuring them in their ads as well as sponsoring their tours. There was also some acknowledgment that ads used music by composers such as Mozart as well as popular music.

These categories refer to "adverts taking songs and putting them on the TV", with the emphasis on the kind of music which has been used in this way. Informants also

discussed ads making their own music, in the form of "jingles" or "wee tunes". These were frequently described as "catchy" or "lively", to the extent that

> Some of them I find myself singing. "Sanatoge-en, oh oh" [sings]. I find myself going through the day singing that one. [female workers 18-20]

Personal feminine hygiene ads were mentioned as having particularly "catchy" tunes. Indeed, several informants (male and female) described their embarrassment when they caught themselves walking along the street singing or humming jingles associated with those products!

While many of these "little songs" were thought to be lively and catchy, there were some exceptions. For example, the ads for TV Quick* (a TV listings magazine launched when the listings market was deregulated) had "really annoying, manic music". Similarly, while they were not actually annoying, the Coke jingles used in ads which did not feature stars were "very sort of bland". The Sterling ads (which did not always use music) were also lambasted in this context:

> The stuff they use in the Sterling advert is probably like a porno film, you know, sort of cheap xylophone music. [unemployed female 21-24]

In some cases, music was simply thought to provide a "background" or soundtrack" to ads, or to offer familiarity, and "something you know". In other cases, it could "put you in a mood" or "create an atmosphere":

> That advert with the Strollers, the sweeties? That's from Black, and I love that record. I think it's good for that advert, it's really sort of exactly how the guy's walking, he's just sort of sauntering along, and that's what the record's like. [unemployed females 21-24]

Sometimes, music actually formed part of the story. For example, a Coke ad featured a young guitarist auditioning for a band. It could also tell some of the story, as did the "song about Scotland" in a Tennent's ad* featuring a Scot leaving his job in London to come back to Edinburgh. Similarly, a Nescafe ad featured a tearful young woman driving her car up a hill and making herself a cup of coffee. The song "I can see clearly now" was used:

> ...cos there's no words, no dialogue, they're looking for a song that can put across a simple message. So it's a song about someone really cheering up and getting a brighter outlook on life. [male student 21-24]

In other cases, informants talked about how ads would adapt familiar songs, and "change the words and just keep the same tune". This was generally thought to integrate the music more closely with the brand. For example, one group discussed

the ad for Lurpak butter which changed the words "Leader of the Pack" to "Leader of Lurpak". Similarly,

- What was that one? It was an advert on the telly, it was Vitalite.
- That was the Israelites song.
- That's the one. It was quite good. They add their own wee catchphrases, incorporated into the song. [female workers 18-20]

1.3.3.5. Ads using sex or stereotypes

As a male student observed, "they use sex...to sell everything these days". Informants spoke of ads which appeared "sexy, sophisticated, cool", or used a "sort of play on sex appeal":

> There's ones like the Sunkist and Coke adverts, with beautiful bodies, sex, agility. [male graduate worker 21-24]

Informants also referred to "stereotyped" ads. Here, "sexist" ads received particular attention, such as those showing "women charging around in these very short skirts", "the perfect mother" or "a typical housewife doing all the washing for her husband". One informant spent some time trying to categorise a series of ads for tights:

> I think they're more sensual than sexual because they're aimed at women on the sensual basis but I think they hit all men on the sexual basis...I don't see it as a really sexist advert because it's to appeal to women. You might say well it promotes a stereotype of the woman wearing stockings and looking sexy, but then in that one there an element of independence that when her car broke down she fixed it herself, didn't get a man to do it. [male students 21-24]

Two other categories of stereotyped ads were identified quite often. Many informants referred to "family stereotype" ads implying that the nuclear family was the only possible form of household grouping. Secondly, there was often some discussion of "perfect people" ads.

> Good looking guy, good looking girl...It's a bit of a sort of stereotype thing. [unemployed female 21-24]

Finally, there were some references to "stereotype-breaking adverts". For example, one informant described how an Irn-Bru ad

> ...takes all the sort of American Coca-Cola type stereotypes and just turns them on the head. [male student 21-24]

Similarly, ads for Persil washing-up liquid* were "not quite so traditional", as they showed the Scottish comedian Robbie Coltrane washing dishes, rather than a wife or mother. On a more serious note, a Bisto ad, showing a boy and his separated father*

was "obviously trying to portray real life", and an ad showing an inept father trying to look after three babies was thought to be saying "oh look, we're not sexist".

1.3.4. Ad executions: Cardboard ads, studio jobs and well-produced ads

Several distinctions seemed to refer to the way in which ads were produced or executed, rather than their approach or appeal. Informants were very aware of television and cinema ads which used "still pictures", "backdrops" and "voiceovers".

> You get tons of these adverts with the same guy reading out a board with someone holding up a camera and a terrible slogan. [male students 21-24]

> It just shows you pictures of cars and it goes "buy your Lada from Fraser's" [laughter]. And then this really home-made tune comes up... [female students 18-20]

Informants deployed a lively vocabulary to denounce these ads, which they generally found laughable. Thus, a male graduate worker poured scorn on ads with "elevator music" and "wonky pictures", and another male worker dismissed various ads as "cardboard ones", or "ones that are still, you know, like a cardboard shot". Apparently only a small way along the evolutionary chain were "studio jobs", which showed some movement but appeared dated, staged or stilted. Local ads for shops selling furniture or electrical goods fell into this category: several informants talked about "cheap, wham bam type adverts", with pictures of products "flashing across the screen". Other "studio jobs" used "cardboard cutouts" or simple "backdrops" behind a live actor or personality. These were often described as "naff", "tacky", or "rubbish". Cinema ads using the same dated film footage but different voiceovers to promote local restaurants were discussed in this context. The Sterling ads were also described as "naff", "cardboard" or "studio jobs". Indeed, several informants observed that Dougie Donnelly was nowhere to be seen in the furniture warehouse which he advertised:

> They don't even take him there. He's telling you to go there and he's not got the common decency to go there. He's superimposed on a picture of the building.
> [male graduate workers 21-24]

In another group, these ads were cited as an example of "the old formula":

> - Have a little jingle, a little phrase, like "Sterling Tillicoultry, near Stirling", that sort of phrase, have the picture there of the thing
> - And have a celebrity
> - Yeah, and basically nauseate everybody! [female students 18-20]

In contrast to cardboard ads and "studio jobs", informants identified ads which were

"well done", "good quality", or "glossy":

> It's remarkably done...it's all black and white, it's not just somebody standing in a studio and doing something, it's like a small, a really good film, it looks good. [male students 21-24]

Informants also appreciated good quality in print ads. For example, a female worker explained that she liked women's magazine ads because "they've got really good photographs...done very artfully". Similarly, a male worker appreciated the "papyrus"-like texture of a print ad he had seen.

1.3.5. Informants' categorisations of ads: an assessment

No one group or individual identified the entire "spectrum" of advertising styles presented above. Overall, however, they demonstrated a sophisticated understanding of a wide range of advertising styles, reflecting many of the appeals, arousal techniques and common forms mentioned in the Boston University framework (Bichan et al 1982). In fact, they went considerably beyond it, drawing the outlines of various advertising styles and also filling in their light and shade. Informants' comments and categorisations echo many of the themes in Lannon's (1992) continuum of advertising styles. For example, ads for Sterling or local shops were discussed in similar terms to "the manufacturer speaks". Informants' treatment of the Gold Blend ads fits the "target group consumes with pleasure" category, while "rip-off" ads were appreciated in a way consistent with "hyperbole and exaggeration". Discussion of the Silk Cut ads placed them in the "brand adapts symbols and metaphors" category, and the Guinness ads were considered in terms of the "brand inventing its own language".

1.4. Awareness of advertising trends

In addition to identifying a wide range of advertising styles, the young adults referred to various advertising trends. They tended to describe these in terms of styles associated with the past or the present. Several informants were more analytical in their approach, relating changes in advertising to changes in society, consumer experiences or expectations.

Some informants talked about "the old adverts from when they had black and white television", and how they had been "jazzed up" since then, no longer using "the same actors and the same voiceovers and the same sort of set". It was suggested that

perhaps ten or twenty years ago, ads "never used to be subtle, they used to be direct". Indeed, a parallel was drawn with television programmes in the past:

> Do you remember "Nationwide" on telly? It seems to me that a lot of the adverts were "Nationwide"-type adverts then, what people thought they could do with television or tried to do with it, just wasn't very much. [male graduate workers 21-24]

While some references to advertising in "the past" were quite vague in terms of the time period involved, "the Seventies" were frequently mentioned. Thus, local cinema ads were often thought to use film footage dating from then, as the people in them tended to sport sideburns or flared trousers. Ads for Tunnock's biscuits were "cheap and nasty - Sixties, Seventies", and Radion's home movie-style ads "might have worked in the Seventies, but not now". Perhaps inevitably, the Sterling ads were also assigned to this era:

> Sterling seems to be so much older, like a Seventies advert as well as being just downright cheap and nasty [laughter]. A very, very dated advertising technique.[male graduate workers 21-24]

Ads labelled "Seventies" tended to be considered "cheap", "nasty" or "tacky". However, many informants were only born in that decade, so the label may be convenient rather than particularly well-informed. Their disparaging of "Seventies" ads is perhaps surprising, given the alleged Seventies fashion revival in recent years: a new generation was supposedly warming to flared trousers and platform shoes. This era had certainly not been rehabilitated for informants, at least in an advertising context.

In general, there was a sense that while ads in the past had "tended to be like Sterling all the time", the quality of advertising had improved in recent years, and advertisers had become "much slicker, much better at what they're doing". It was suggested that over the past five years, advertisers had realised that commercial breaks were "not just a space to be filled":

> I think there's a lot more emphasis put on advertising and turning them into, you know, the length of a short film, using episodes, putting a lot more money into it. Adverts are taking on a lot more casting, a lot more costume performance. [female students 21-24]

In terms of current advertising, ads "promoting the family" as a whole, and the father in particular, were thought to be in vogue:

> The adverts with the perfect mother, they tended to belong like five years back. But there's still quite a lot of them around...There's a new thing now, the father being with the kids, and the mother going out. [female students 18-20]

> I mean, they say something like "The 1990s is going to be the family decade" or whatever. It's supposed to be your wife and kids. In the 1980s there was more get out and go. The independent man, woman type thing. [male student 21-24]

Some informants also talked of noticing "new styles of advertising", such as ads split over the commercial break, or the use of several slightly different versions:

> I've noticed a fairly new style of advertising. Where they maybe tell you half the advert in the very first advert...and the second half in the very last advert in the commercial break. [male workers 21-24, mixed]

> Another kind of advertising that's recently coming out, I read about it...There's just one small change that you don't notice but then you saw the old one again and you think "isn't that funny"? [female students 18-20]

The Radion ads cropped up again in this context. While one informant considered them to be leftovers from the 1970's, another described them as using "a new approach to advertising":

> ...it's such a new idea for advertising that hasn't been done for twenty or thirty years....It's just going back to basic advertising. It's quite clever in the timing: just as everyone else is getting more complex and in depth, doing scientific tests and things like that, they're just building a barbecue and getting all sweaty. [male students 21-24]

This seems a particularly sophisticated analysis, as it recognises that Radion's "new idea" existed only in relation to current advertising approaches, and was fundamentally derivative.

There was some discussion of the possible reasons for the growing sophistication and complexity of ads. In marked contrast to the practitioners interviewed earlier, informants tended to give themselves much of the credit:

> Like we realise that products are being sold to us and we're bored with the old style and we're becoming sceptical about it and they have to keep producing new ideas. I don't know, we're wising up. [female students 18-20]

There was, however, some recognition of the interdependence between consumers and advertisers. Thus, the student quoted above recognised the context in which "old style" ads would have been seen previously:

> But I suppose when the very first advert of that type came on television, everyone was sort of talking about it in the way we're talking about Hamlet adverts. [female students 18-20]

Similarly, the popularity of subtle and complex ads was attributed at least in part to cigarette advertisers:

...apparently other brands who don't need to are starting to do it just because it seems like a good idea. [male students 21-24]

2. SURROGATE STRATEGISTS

A second dimension of informants' advertising literacy related to their willingness and ability to take on the role of advertising strategists. In many cases, they slipped unprompted into this analytical mode when discussing particular ads. In other cases, their comments were in response to questions about what they thought advertisers set out to do, or how they might go about doing it. In general, informants appeared to have a broad understanding of the process of advertising strategy development. They recognised that it was a collaborative effort:

I don't think any one person will have any sense of "I came up with that". [male workers 21-24, mixed]

The company themselves will have an idea how they want to promote their product and probably give the advertising company guidelines or an outline of how they want to go. [unemployed males 21-24]

Once the agency had been given guidelines, informants thought it would try to generate several ideas, rather than just one. It was suggested that more than one "designer" would be assigned the task, and that they might compete to come up with the best idea. Various idea-generation techniques were mentioned. One informant claimed that agency people often watched "The Blues Brothers" film "for inspiration". Some fell back on stereotyped ideas of waking in the middle of the night with an idea, or coming up with it in the pub. Others thought that ideas would result from discussion within the agency, or of research among consumers:

I also have visions of them like poring over their market research and using psychologists or whatever to decide what to do to sell to whatever group of people... [male worker 21-24]

One informant remembered a scene from the television series "thirtysomething" featuring two admen:

And I mind seeing them...thinking of an idea for an advert, and both of them were sitting at one side of the room and were firing ideas over at each other. I seen that. They ended up going bust. [male workers 18-20]

His tone suggested that it was entirely appropriate for grown men who spent their time "firing ideas over at each other" to go bust, but there was some recognition in that group that there was method in the madness. Thus, once there were ideas, the

best (or an amalgamation) would be chosen, based on

> ...which one is going to get across to the section of the public they want to hit sort of thing, young, old or whatever. [male workers 18-20]

However, it was recognised that even after the agency had chosen an idea, the client made the ultimate decision. Thus, what really mattered was "whether the company that's selling is going to like it or not".

Such descriptions provide a reasonable overview of the process of advertising planning. Informants offered much more detailed insights into the process, however. Drawing on a specialist vocabulary, they talked about various advertising objectives and target markets, and intended brand positions. They could place such discussions in the context of the market for particular products, and offered some thoughts on campaigns, media scheduling and timing. Finally, they used various criteria to assess the effectiveness of an ad, and were aware of some regulatory constraints. These issues are now addressed in turn.

2.1. Use of specialist vocabulary

At a Market Research Society seminar in London in 1990, Alan Setford challenged advertising research practitioners to distinguish between the written comments of marketers and "ordinary" consumers on ads. The resulting confusion supported his claim that we live in an "ad-fluent" society. Using Setford's litmus-test, the following scraps of conversation could easily have been located in advertising agencies:

> I think Levi's and Guinness are very much at the top of their particular genre. Humour's the thing in the Guinness adverts and style is the raison d'etre of the other two.[male students 21-24]

> I don't know about the Nescafe Gold Blend. I think they're away off the track now, I really do. I think they've lost the gist of things. They're so busy trying to build up this hyped affair... [female workers 18-20]

While these comments simply show informants at their ease dissecting ads, they also had the linguistic tools to do this more precisely. They used quite a specialist vocabulary to express their thoughts on a wide range of advertising issues. Turning first to marketing and advertising strategies, informants referred to advertisers seeking to "capture the market" for products. Advertisers were thought to consider "who to appeal to", so that they could "target", "aim", or "direct" messages or even "campaigns" towards particular "sections of society". In terms of advertising objectives, informants used terms such as "exposure", "high awareness", "brand-

switching", "image-building" and "changing people's perceptions". Describing ad elements, they referred to "voiceovers", "the logo", "captions", "catchphrases", "slogans", and "jingles". Informants also distinguished between "low-budget" and "big-budget" efforts. They referred to ideas as "portrayed", brands as "endorsed" by celebrities, and some ads as working in an "almost subliminal" way.

2.2. Advertisers' intentions

On balance, the practitioners interviewed believed that consumers "can have a flavour for what the advertising is trying to do". Such sentiments do not capture the sophistication of the young adults' "schemer schema" (Wright 1986). They demonstrated awareness of a range of advertising objectives and shrewdly second-guessed the intentions behind particular ads and campaigns. Taken as a whole, informants' comments echoed "hierarchy of effects" theories advanced in advertising management textbooks. Aaker et al (1992:89) explain the hierarchy of effects in terms of "intervening variables" between advertising and sales, such as

> ...brand awareness, brand comprehension, brand image or personality, brand attitude, the perception that an important reference group value that brand, and the association of desired feelings with a brand or use experience.

When asked what advertisers generally set out to do, several informants replied initially in terms of achieving sales. Indeed, an unemployed female turned the question around, asking what else an ad could be trying to do "if it wasn't to make you go out and buy the product". However, she and many others were able to answer this question for themselves. At the minimum they recognised that advertisers could go about "selling things" in different ways:

> Like there's those adverts that try to be clever, so that it appeals to people who try to work it out....they may try to be funny...[or] give themselves a better image than their competitors. If there's a new product, just to let people know. [female students 18-20]

One set of advertising objectives which was frequently discussed concerned attention, awareness and recall. As one informant observed,

> I think most advertisers try to be original, try to do something new, try and attract attention. [male workers 21-24, mixed]

In order to attract attention, advertisers were thought to use devices such as bright colours, "catchy tunes", or something "that catches your eye and makes you want to listen". This was thought to be particularly the case for new products. Indeed,

> You almost get embarrassed sometimes when a new product is coming out, and a new advert that's just really trying to grab your attention... [male student 18-20]

Informants also thought that advertisers wanted to "make an advert that you remember" and associate with the product. In addition to repetition, irritation was thought to have a role to play, and this was discussed much as the practitioners had hoped:

> I think sometimes [advertisers intend] probably to annoy you to a certain extent. Cos it sort of sticks in your mind. [male workers 21-24]

Awareness or recall were not necessarily considered an end in themselves, however. In keeping with the hierarchy of effects tradition, brand awareness was seen as a stage on the way to purchase. Thus, those advertising Sterling

> ...know you're not just going to buy a sofa just cos they put an advert on the telly. But you'll probably think of the name when you go to buy a new sofa. [male graduate workers 21-24]

Advertisers were also thought to be trying to gain consumers' interest:

> I think they're trying to make a wee story into the advert as well to make you watch the advert...and thinking more about what they're trying to sell. [male workers 18-20]

This may also be designed to "get you thinking about the product", or "influence the way you think". For example, advertisers may try to "promote an image" for a brand, persuading consumers that a particular brand is stylish, forms part of a particular lifestyle, has particular strengths, or is better or cheaper than its competitors. It may also be trying

> ...to make their company look more important. Like they've got money to spend on advertising so their stuff might be quite good. [female workers 18-20]

In terms of action, many informants took the discussion beyond the simple level of "buying things". As mentioned before, several referred to bus shelter ads which had been designed to see how many people noticed them or tried to find out what they were about. Some informants distinguished between frequent and one-off purchases:

> I think the Ariston is sort of relying on you buying something once....Bisto, they're relying on you watching the adverts again and buying the product again. [female students 18-20]

> They're trying to, I think, secure a place in the market where they're always going to get buyers. They don't just want people to go out and buy it once and not buy it again. Cos...they'll be bust in six months if that happens. [female graduate workers 21-24]

Others referred to the reinforcement or reminding functions of advertising. In one group, someone wondered why companies need to advertise once everyone knows

about their products. This was met with a quick response:

> ...there's that many products coming on the market anyway. If the ones who are at the top don't keep advertising, keep on pushing their product, because other products are coming in, people are going to use them, they may be cheaper or a lot better. [unemployed males 21-24]

Similarly, a student commented that advertisers were obliged to bring out ads to "stop people thinking the brand is going downhill". Others observed that while established companies did not need "to twist your arm", they had to remind people that "we're still here", and maintain their brands' image:

> Coke, you know, they have the image, and they just have to boost it every now and then, to tell everyone that Coke's the number one preference. They don't do much else.
> [male workers 21-24]

Some corporate objectives were also discussed. As we have seen, a male worker thought that ICI's corporate ads may be intended to attract investors or maintain company loyalty. Someone else suggested that good advertising might have a role to play for struggling companies:

> I think even when a company is going broke it's quite often worth it to get even more into debt to pretend you're well by presenting yourself in an expensive way to maybe generate faith from other people. [male student 18-20]

Finally, several informants mentioned that advertising agencies had their own interests to pursue, and may try to "make a name for themselves" or "advertise themselves". As one informant put it,

> The advertisers themselves are always trying to outdo their competitors as well...you've got awards for the best advertisement so it's not just the products themselves they're selling. They're selling themselves as a company to advertise products. [unemployed males 21-24]

2.3. Target audiences

Among the practitioners interviewed, there was some uncertainty about the extent of consumers' sensitivity to targeting. On the one hand, it was felt that consumers could "deflect" ads which were not aimed at them. However, consumers were also thought to criticise ads without thinking about their target market.

The young adults in this study certainly recognised that ads were often targeted towards particular groups. While there were some references to ads aimed at demographic groups such as men, women, "mums" or "housewives", informants most commonly discussed targeting in terms of age, particularly in relation to their

own age-group.

> Maybe they're being aimed at our age-group and that's why we find them interesting. [female students 18-20]

> We're criticising the washing machine adverts, but maybe because they're not aimed at our age. They're aimed at middle age. [male graduate workers 21-24]

Of course, such reflexivity must be placed in context: these comments were after all made in advertising research settings. However, it is still interesting that informants were capable of thinking in such terms, even if they, like the practitioners, might not always do so. One group designed an all-purpose, ad-by-numbers which would appeal to "our sort of age-group", while another informant was very resentful of formulaic "youth" ads:

> - ...a good looking guy...a nice arty intelligent looking man as well...
> - Some culty music in the background...
> - And the colour as well...dark, seductive colours [female students 18-20]

> ...all hip-hop, flashing lights, and "yo kids, let's go groovin'". I could imagine the advertising executive sitting at his desk thinking "oh, this'll appeal to the kids, this'll drag them in, they'll fall for this one". [male students 18-20]

Occasionally, the discussion moved beyond targeting on the basis of age. Some references to other variables were quite vague, as in "different groups in society and stuff". However there were some more specific references to possible targets, such as the not entirely accurate "ABs, B2s, C2s" social groups, "your sophisticated person", and

> ...the safe sort of family group, the young yuppie, money- oriented...quirky off-beat people. [male students 21-24]

> ...the aspirers, and the people who've already got it, and people who haven't got a hope in hell... [female students 18-20]

Target audiences for health education ads were also discussed. Thus, Aids ads should be "targeted for the people most likely" to be infected, while

> I think the only people [anti-drug ads] would work for are people that dinnae touch drugs. Cos when people are hooked on things like that they dinnae give a hang. [male workers 18-20]

Finally, some informants analysed targeting strategies in more detail. For example, one group debated the value of ads which were aimed at very narrowly defined audiences:

> - I suppose the ones that people don't understand are catered for people that do...

- But you're not just wanting to advertise to people who already drink it or who know about your products surely? You want to advertise to get as many people interested in them as possible. [female graduate workers 21-24]

No doubt the trade-offs involved in situations like this are still being discussed in agency-client meetings around the country. Another informant described how McEwan's targeting of ads at different groups gave the company wider coverage of the market, although his segmentation bases were unusual:

> [McEwan's] aims at different sections of the population. The one with the Chinheads.* [is] aimed at quite a young section who go out and buy records as well. Whereas the one with the sort of deep thought, people started working and that, people buying a flat and things like that, it's maybe aimed at that section. So they're probably aimed at a good cross-section of the population, a whole set of adverts. [male workers 21-24, mixed]

2.4. Positioning

According to Aaker et al (1992:131), the development of an advertising strategy requires the selection of a target market, and also of a brand position. They explain that

> A brand's position in a consumer's mind is a relative concept, in that it refers to a comparative assessment of how this brand is similar to or different from the other brands that compete with it.

Such concepts were by no means alien to the young adults interviewed in this study. Some brands were thought to "go for quality", while others tried for "a young image". Thus, while the Sterling ads were "naff", they were not trying to "put across a class impression" of their furniture anyway. In the case of Haagen Dazs ice-cream ads, it was suggested that the sexual imagery was important,

> because they can't really - I mean, what difference has that ice-cream got from a lot of other quality ice-creams? Not a lot really...So they really have to have their own image because it'd just be like any other ice-cream advert or any other ice-cream. [unemployed female 21-24]

In one group, there was some heated discussion about the level of skill displayed by the advertisers of Radion. One informant leapt to their defense, asking

> Would you have thought of selling a new product on the point of dirt and odours rather than just dirt? [male graduate workers 21-24]

Brands which were trying to "change their image" were also discussed, particularly in the alcohol market. For example, McEwan's lager had changed its "really bad image" to become more sophisticated. Discussing a magazine ad for Glenfiddich, one informant speculated about the advertiser's intentions:

I would have said malt whisky is a very esoteric thing that people drink: we have to make it, let people know they can relax, it's just a normal drink...we want to see our product..where a person's at home. [male workers 21-24, mixed]

The Guinness campaign generated much discussion in relation to its repositioning of the brand:

Some adverts like if they have a product they might aim it to a different age group. Like the Guinness ones especially, where they're trying to set up this really really fashionable image. [unemployed males 18-20]

For a long time, Guinness was thought to have had a "smokey old pub in Ireland" image. It had been seen as an "old man's drink", or one for the "hard-drinking man", rather than "something you go into a posh bar and ask for". However, the Rutger Hauer ads were thought to have given the brand a younger, cooler and more sophisticated image, at ease with "posh bar" surroundings.

Finally, informants sometimes criticised positioning strategies, either in principle or in terms of execution. For example, one informant, who thought the Gold Blend ads were "all very suave and sophisticated", commented that

The thing was, they had a special offer, didn't they, of a gold bean on a chain, which I think kind of lowered it a bit [laughter]. People who are going to drink the stuff aren't going to send off for it, a necklace. [female students 18-20]

It may be that the "people who drink the stuff" aspire to rather than possess a "suave and sophisticated" lifestyle, and thus may have been more amenable to the promotion than this informant expected. Nonetheless, she recognised that the promotion may erode the brand's image. The most sustained and explicit articulation of positioning concepts, however, concerned cinema ads for Gordon's Gin*:

- Gordon's are not succeeding on the quality with this, it's just not going anywhere...
- It's really silly because they've got probably the best, well the best to my mind, bottle of gin.
- But that's because they've built up their image in the past with adverts.
- Why are they destroying it now?
- Because what they're trying to do is get a younger image, they want young people to drink gin...They've got the quality, now all they're trying to do is get young people to drink gin.
- They should just get young people with the quality. That advert, what's the connection? They're a green bottle, and therefore? Bloody hell, that is nothing to do with the product.
- If they went to how it was made, what...gin's from juniper berries, is it? So where do all these juniper berries grow?
- Israel.
- Israel! Oh hey, "Catch those rays, on the beach, get pissed...." [male graduate workers 21-24]

This discussion has many of the ingredients of an advertising strategy meeting. The objectives and target audience are addressed, and the current and historic brand

position is outlined and evaluated. There is a search for a "story" to tell about the brand, and following a well-trodden path, the product's ingredients and origins are suggested as the basis for that story.

2.5. Market context

On quite a few occasions, informants put their analysis of advertising objectives, target audiences and brand positions in the context of a particular brand or product category's market conditions. Thus, Radion entered "one of the most saturated markets going", and washing powder manufacturers were thought to be "maybe trying to supercede their own product" at times. TV Quick was described as taking advantage of the deregulation of TV listings, and as using "saturation advertising" which was possible because of strong financial backing. Ford was at the time using

> ...one of the longest ads I've seen on the television. I suppose they're trying to shift a lot of cars at the moment with the recession...I suppose they've got the money to do it.
>
> [male worker 21-24]

While Tennent's and McEwan's were "sort of arch-rivals", it was suggested that external competition had forced their ads to become more sophisticated:

> I think it's been brought on a lot by imported beers. I think all the imported beers have become really popular really quickly. And I think this is the big brewers, the Scottish brewers, attempting to maybe stave that off, that's probably what brought it all on.
>
> [male workers 21-24 mixed]

However, there was some doubt that McEwan's or Tennent's branding was strong enough to overcome the tied pubs system, which meant that only one of the two would be available in many pubs. Several informants argued that people would not leave a pub if it did not serve the other brand.

The limited positions available to various brands or product categories were also recognised in some cases. Thus, it was recognised that "regional" or "local" ads frequently had very low budgets. It was thought to be difficult to "glamorise" food products, and while washing powder ads were widely criticised, some mitigating circumstances were acknowledged:

> I think you're limited in how you could advertise a washing powder. It's like, there's only one situation you can wash in, in the kitchen. [unemployed females 21-24]

2.6. Campaigns and media planning

Informants generally seemed to understand a "campaign" as a series of ads for a brand, over time and possibly across different media. For example, a male student suggested that a company had "carried on the campaign too long really", and another commented that a "whole campaign" involved television, posters, and newspapers. There was also a sense that advertisers "build" campaigns, by repeating "their own slogans" or using consistent themes. Thus, Volkswagen and Hamlet "kept to the one theme, almost reliability in both of them". Similarly,

> [Guinness and Coke ads] keep on changing all the time, but it's still roughly the same theme, all based around the same sort of thing... [unemployed male 21-24]

> You've got to make them different but on the same theme so you know what the product is. It's quite hard to find, it's a hard balance to get. [male students 18-20]

In terms of media planning, one informant discussed the placement of ads for records and concerts in music programmes or magazines, and observed

> I suppose it all boils down to the people you want to attract and the time you want to put your adverts on. [unemployed males 21-24]

Similarly, it was suggested that Estee Lauder cosmetics were aimed at

> ...women who obviously have enough to spend on expensive make-up...obviously that's why they advertise it in more expensive magazines rather than Bella or something where it's just 35 pence. [female graduate worker 21-24]

Informants were also aware that media scheduling could prevent people from becoming too bored with ads. For example, British Telecom was thought to "put out maybe four at a time and then break" for a while, and Harp "have one advert for three weeks, four weeks, then another advert". Similarly,

> I think they have six or seven Guinness adverts that go on...they have it on for a wee while then they put a different one on and then maybe they bring one of them back later...and you think "I haven't seen this for ages", you know, and just watch it again.
> [male graduate worker 21-24]

2.7. Advertising effectiveness

Sales were sometimes mentioned as a measure of an ad's success. For example,

> That Rutger Hauer has done a lot for Guinness as well. Before that advert the sales were pretty poor. But see when they got him, the sales went right up, and it's really popular now.
> [unemployed males 18-20]

Other informants talked about brand-switching as an effect of advertising. Thus, Levi's sales were said to have overtaken Wrangler's as a result of their ads. There was however some confusion regarding the effects of cigarette advertising:

> An advert might affect there for changing your brand, but not for starting.
> [unemployed females 21-24]

Similarly, another informant thought that if faced with "rows upon rows of identical looking packages", someone might choose a brand such as Silk Cut, familiar because of its advertising. However, she then rejected her own logic, because

> ...if you smoke you tend to stick to a certain brand and not change, and why should you if you're happy with what you've got? [female students 18-20]

Informants recognised that an ad did not have to result in an immediate sale, but may be useful in achieving other ends. For example, in the case of insurance advertising,

> The point of that is not that you're just going to walk in and say "I want your policy". It would just draw your attention to it. [female students 21-24]

Indeed, attention, awareness and recall were often mentioned in assessments of advertising effectiveness. For example,

> - There's a very good advert just now, I honestly can't remember what it's for [laughter].
> - A very good advert! [male students 21-24]

In this respect, there was even some grudging recognition of the effectiveness of the "rubbish" and "unprofessional" Radion ads:

> ...we're all talking about Radion at the moment...At least they're getting some sort of publicity, and the name's sticking. [male workers 21-24]

Some ads were evaluated in terms of their communication effects. Thus, even "cardboard" ads may "get the message over" about what they have to offer. The Guinness ads "changed people's perceptions of it as an old man's drink", and the Holsten Pils ads were thought to "make you want to have it". Various action-related effects of advertising were also mentioned. For example, a student criticised a perfume ad because it did not help her to follow what she saw as the logical step from brand awareness and curiosity:

> I've never seen the perfume anywhere. I think it's a dreadful advert...I mean, it doesn't say where it's available. Supposing you wanted to smell it or something? [female students 21-24]

A male student suggested that the Guinness campaign seemed to be working, because "far more places actually sell Guinness now". Thus, he recognised that an

ad's effectiveness could be assessed in terms of distribution as well as actual sales.

2.8. Regulation

Most of the discussions and interviews were conducted in the summer of 1991. Around that time, there was considerable media attention devoted to the European Community's deliberations over the banning of tobacco advertising, and to the British ban on television ads for cigars effective from October that year. Thus, it is not surprising that it was the issue of tobacco advertising which dominated informants' discussion of regulation in advertising. Much of this talk centred on whether or not tobacco products could be advertised at all in the various media. Many informants realised that cigarettes could not be advertised on British television. There was also some awareness of the impending ban on cigar ads, which was sometimes mentioned after informants had described a particularly enjoyable Hamlet or Castella ad:

> There's so many cigar adverts on TV at the moment cos they're going to get banned really soon or something. [female students 21-24]

There was also some awareness that "they're trying to stop cigarette advertising", but there was confusion over whether this had actually happened or was about to:

> There's a lot of cigarette posters going about. Mind you I think that's stopping nowadays. I'm not sure. [female workers 18-20]
>
> - They're trying to stop cigarette advertising.
> - It's more drink they're trying to stop.
> - No, it's cigarettes. It's the Europeans. They're trying to stop all advertising of cigarettes...There's a lot of fight with the cigarette companies, they'll not take it lying down. [unemployed males 18-20]

In addition to recognising existing, impending or threatened bans on tobacco ads, informants were generally aware that their content was controlled. This helped to explain their "obscure" or "minimal" style:

> I think you can understand why they do it because they're quite restricted in how they can advertise. [male graduate workers 21-24]

Several informants mentioned that alcohol ads were also subject to restrictions. For example, there had been "a big fuss" about a Babycham ad,

> ...because the girl, like she had it in her hand and everyone was crowding round her... [male workers 18-20]

In addition to the case of tobacco and alcohol advertising, informants talked about other restrictions on advertising. While someone thought that ads were not allowed to say "buy this product", others were better informed and referred to restrictions on comparative ads, for example:

> I dinnae think they're allowed to slag each other off. They couldnae sort of say "This is Bold, dinnae buy Ariel", sort of thing. [male workers 21-24]

Similarly, several informants maintained that advertisers were not allowed to tell lies:

> ...adverts aren't allowed to blatantly lie. I mean they can say they're the best cos that doesn't mean anything. [male student 18-20]

Someone else suggested that claims had to

> ...meet advertising standards and things. It's got to be real. Like the Locktite man stuck to his board and over all the sharks in the sea. I thought that had to be true or it wouldn't be allowed, nowadays. [female graduate workers 21-24]

Informants also thought that ads may be "pulled" if enough complaints were received from the public. However, they were not clear about the procedures and the bodies involved in regulating ads. Thus, there were vague references to "the authorities" "the censors and advertising standards or whatever", and "a Board you have to get it passed by". Others were slightly more informed. For example, the mixed group of male workers thought that the Advertising Standards Authority dealt with complaints about magazine ads, while "the IBA, the Independent Broadcasting Authority" addressed problems with television advertising. Similarly,

> Is it the IBA or something, they've got to run checks on their adverts and things like that before they can show them. [male workers 18-20]

3. CASUAL COGNOSCENTI

Thus far, the young adults appear to be highly capable consumers of advertising and plausible performers in the role of advertising strategists. A third dimension of their sophistication went beyond the roles of consumers or strategists. They frequently commented on technical details and costs relating to ads, and they offered various behind-the-scenes stories about the making of particular ads. In these discussions, the young adults evoked images of amateur experts or casual cognoscenti.

3.1. Appreciation of technical details and production values

Informants were very sensitive to what the practitioners referred to as "production values". In some cases, they could not articulate their thoughts precisely. For example, the photography in some magazine ads was simply described as "quite classily done" and television ads were considered "very good the way it was shot". Such problems of expression may be attributed in part to tacit knowledge, acquired and absorbed with experience, but not usually requiring to be articulated. Lannon (1985) argues that young adults have a well-developed "visual literacy", but as Dondis (1982) has pointed out, formal education focuses on verbal rather than visual communication. Thus, the young adults in this study may have experienced problems in expressing their knowledge.

They did however frequently draw on specialist terms to describe the way in which ads were produced. Many of the technical terms used applied largely to filmed commercials. Thus, ads were "directed", "produced" and "edited". Scenes were "cut" or "spliced up", and voices were sometimes "dubbed". Cameras might "pan down" or "pan backwards", and use might be made of a "tinted lens", "freeze frames", "helicopter angles" or "spectacular aerial shots". Dialogue was "scripted" and sometimes presented to camera, and Dougie Donnelly was "superimposed" on a shot of the furniture warehouse. Other terms, such as pictures being "touched up" applied more to print techniques. Thus, one print ad was described as "all done in sort of like brown tones", and another as "Andy Warhol style - multiple repeated images and different colours".

It could be argued that such vocabulary may reveal little real understanding. Indeed, technical terms were not always used convincingly:

> They look like someone's home movies. It's been dubbed on to a crappy camera, there's a lot of focus, going out of focus and the camera is jiggling about. [male students 21-24]

> ...the advert was very well put together. It was produced very well or what do you call, directed very well. I don't know. Probably produced very well. [male worker 18-20]

Most of the time, however, technical language appeared to be used appropriately, and was often accompanied by descriptions of techniques. In other cases, where informants did not have a formal label for a particular technique or effect, they could explain what they meant. For example, in an ad featuring a student being interviewed by a bank manager, "the camera was like the student". Similarly,

someone described how ads for Anchor butter could achieve the effect of dancing cows:

> They've just photographed them and taken out the right shots to look like they're dancing. [female students 18-20]

Several informants provided more detailed descriptions of advertising techniques which had impressed them. For example, a television ad claiming that Ariston appliances go "on and on and Ariston" was praised, as was a print ad for a car:

> You have one scene to begin with and two people come in, and that part of the film gets repeated, then more characters are brought in. There's some bits where you can actually see the characters kind of moving through each other in the way they've sampled it all. [female students 21-24]

> There's a lot more work gone into this photograph than you'd think. Because the car is actually still, the wheels aren't moving and all the scenery's moving. The car is still. It's like it's two things put together. [male graduate workers 21-24]

There was a general acceptance that ads tended to be "slick", "professional" or "well made". However, informants were in no doubt about what separated "the amateurs" from the rest. Thus, in the cinema,

> Some of them are dubbed over and things like that and they just look as if the voice isn't moving at the same time as the lips, they crackle in between and everything, and big scratches on them.. [female students 21-24]

The critical attention to detail given to some ads was well illustrated in another informant's attack on an ad for Tunnock's biscuits, which evidently offended his sense of aesthetics:

> Most adverts, they put make-up on and maybe soften the whole thing. The Tunnocks one is so harsh...It seems as if they've got the bare minimum. They've no music playing and it's just a guy who's speaking and a picture of this plate and it's not even softened, there's no lights in it...A white plate, no design or anything...And he just says "Not first today, Tunnock's Caramel Wafers". And that's it. No finishing titles mentioning the product. [male students 18-20]

3.2. Advertising costs

According to the practitioners, while consumers could distinguish between cheap and expensive ads, they "don't have a clue" about the scale of production or media costs involved. These claims were partly borne out by the young adults' comments. They certainly offered some wildly inaccurate estimates of advertising costs. Thus, an unemployed male suggested that Tina Turner received "fifty million or a thousand or something" for endorsing Pepsi. According to someone else, however,

...seventeen million it cost to make this new Pepsi advert...That was just to make it, like, with Tina Turner and Rod Stewart in it. And they got ten million each, so that's thirty-seven million for an advert. [female worker 18-20]

At the other end of the range, it was suggested that the latest installment of the Gold Blend ads cost "twelve thousand pounds" to make: as someone else in the group pointed out, that would have been "pretty cheap". What informants lacked in precise costing knowledge, however, they made up for with a general sensitivity to what takes money in advertising. They understood that making ads is essentially expensive:

I can well imagine they spend more on the advert, you know for the 30 seconds than they would do for the 30 seconds on TV. [female students 18-20]

Informants had little difficulty in distinguishing between "cheap" and "big budget" ads. They argued that "you can tell, you can always tell" when an ad is on a low budget. Tell-tale signs of cheapness were thought to be "cardboard shots", "stills", and "voices and pictures flashed up on the screen". Ads on late at night or last in the commercial break were also associated with low budgets, as these were thought to be "cheap advertising time". Other cost cues included

...the colour: if it's not bright or deep or black and white, it's sort of yellows and things. It's like a home movie, it's on a stand, it's not sort of moving about. That can be hellish. It's like old video work, it's like it's really made by a school or something. [female students 18-20]

...the camera working...the sound quality...If it's just bad the way it's made...If it sounds terrible, or folk you dinnae recognise. [male workers 21-24]

Adding to this list, a group of male students suggested that if Dougie Donnelly featured in an ad, it had to be cheap! The consensus was that the Sterling ads were cheaply made, although

...to put it on the telly they probably spend a lot of money on it. The amount of time these adverts have been on, it must have been worth their while to spend a bit more on the advert. [male graduate worker 21-24]

They've probably saved in other ways in order to get the, what's the word...exposure. [unemployed female 21-24]

A further distinction made in terms of cheap ads was between those which were "cheap to make" and those which looked cheap. As an unemployed male put it, "cheap adverts don't have to be bad". The cinema ads for Gordon's Gin were praised in this respect by several informants. Thus,

They're not actually expensive. I don't think the answer's to chuck money in, it's a good idea that makes them. [male students 18-20]

Similarly, looking at a print ad, someone else observed

> It's got an expensive look to it but I suppose printing isnae as expensive as making an advert on film. No doubt printing is a lot easier than it is to make a film. [male workers 18-20]

Informants also claimed to be able to tell when a lot of money had been spent on an ad. In general, the use of special effects, "tons of people", "big fancy lights", expensive settings or exotic locations signalled "big budget":

> ... there's no cardboard cutouts in the back, it's all smoothly done...They've just got that glossy look to them. Girls looking perfect. The advert is just shouting out to you "This cost a lot of money, watch it", sort of thing. [male workers 18-20]

Ads which incorporated more of a story, lasted for more than 30 seconds, and had "a lot of thought" put into them, were also thought to be more expensive. Finally, the presence of celebrity endorsers, or famous directors, was frequently mentioned as an indicator of large budgets:

> Obviously a famous person doesn't come cheap. Their fee for a start. All the razzmatazz behind it. [male workers 21-24, mixed]

While these comments suggest that informants were capable of some quite subtle distinctions, they did not always get it right. For example, it was suggested that the Tennent's ad in which a Scot returns from London

> ...would have been quite cheap. It's just a case of the boy walking about....there's a lot of time in travelling but there's not a lot of work...it doesn't take a lot to shoot a wee bit of this and a wee bit of that. [unemployed females 18-20]

Although it would have been cheaper to use real locations rather than building sets for that ad, this informant undoubtedly underestimated the expense of shooting "a wee bit of this and a wee bit of that".

One criticism which practitioners had made of consumers was that they did not take relative budgets into account when judging ads. There was some evidence to contradict that in this study. Informants recognised that local or regional ads were more likely to be low-budget, while conglomerates could probably afford to make "big glossy expensive ones".

> Usually the regional ones are on a low budget, whereas these big conglomerates like Pepsi, Coke, can afford to spend a lot of money. [male workers 21-24, mixed]

> I mean that wouldn't have much to spend on advertising. Because that's multi, whereas this one, there's only one branch of it. [male workers 18-20]

Thus, some informants certainly recognised the budgetary restrictions under which some "tacky" ads were labouring. Occasionally this was mentioned to moderate criticism. Unfortunately for the advertisers, however, low-budget ads were simply too easy a target, and offered too much amusement, for informants to leave alone. While genuinely low-budget advertisers were the butt of many jokes, informants were puzzled by "cheap" ads from companies which they presumed could have afforded a more expensive ad:

> Snickers you'd expect to be quite a big budget one, cos it's quite a big selling thing.
> [male workers 21-24, mixed]

Such ads tended to be treated with suspicion or attempts to rationalise their apparent cheapness. For example, ads for Kellogg's Bran Flakes* and Fruit & Fibre were generally considered "tacky", yet

> - I mean they obviously spent a lot of money on it, Kellogg's Fruit & Fibre. It's just so annoying.
> - Do you think they did? It's really, really bad.
> - Unless they tried...Cos I mean everyone can remember it. Maybe they deliberately went out of their way to do that. [female students 18-20]

Similarly, several informants were confused by the apparent cheapness of the Radion ads. While some interpreted them as a parody of cheap or stereotyped washing powder ads, others wondered they were "trying too hard to be amateur". For example,

> - I dunno why they want it to look cheap. It seems too cheap to look...I couldnae see a company wanting to represent themselves, putting that on...
> - It's like, sort of saying "well, our product's cheaper than everybody else's".
> [male workers 21-24]

3.3. Trading of background stories

Informants quite often had stories to tell about particular ads. For example, some were aware that ads such as Maxell and Oxo had won advertising industry awards, and a male graduate worker told others in his group that Shake & Vac was "the most successful advert of the Eighties". Several informants observed that bus shelter ads which did not seem to be advertising anything were "a marketing thing" to see how much notice people paid to advertising. Others claimed that Sean Connery did a voiceover for a blood donor ad and waived his fees, that Rutger Hauer did not actually like the taste of Guinness, and that the Gold Blend ads were being adapted

for the American market.

Informants' interest in production details also showed through the stories they told about ads. For example, the story behind the making of the L'Egoiste ad* was told in several groups, with slight variations in detail:

> Somebody was telling me about it, my friend, she does Communication Studies...apparently the actual building is in Cannes, but they couldn't film it in Cannes for some reason. They couldn't get a clear shot with nothing else in it but the building and people in the right kind of light. So they reconstructed the whole building in Brazil. It cost an absolute fortune. [female students 21-24]

> It cost them six million pounds because basically it's the Carlton Hotel in Cannes, but it's not. What they've done, they've built it, they had to build it especially for it. It's a hotel front that they built, and it's below scale as well for some reason. [male students 21-24]

Behind-the-scenes activities regarding the use of music in ads were also discussed. Thus, Sting was said to be suing a company which used a session singer to perform one of his songs without permission:

> ...it's a lot cheaper to do that than actually buy the song. That's what Sting was trying to sue them for. [unemployed males 18-20]

Similarly, several informants mentioned that it was a session singer who sang "Heard it through the grapevine" on the first ad in the Levi's 501 campaign:

> The first one that was out wasn't actually Marvin Gaye. It was just a studio copy of it and there was a problem with copyright laws...and then because they seen that there was a market for selling Marvin Gaye again they released the single...[and] remixed the actual original Marvin Gaye single and put it in the advert... [male worker 18-20]

Another Levi's ad featured a track from the punk band The Clash, "because Mick Jones sold out" on the other band members:

> I mean the rights, he just sold it. The rest weren't pleased. [male students 21-24]

Some stories related to disasterous ads from the past. For example, someone talked about an ad which claimed a car was designed by machines, and suffered "really really bad sales" as a result. Others had heard the industry legend of the Strand cigarette ad:

> ...they'd got a wee man that used to smoke it by himself and nobody would buy it because they thought it signified loneliness. [female graduate workers 21-24]

Overall, then, informants had plenty to say about the making or consequences of having made various ads. Some of the stories which they told may have been

exaggerated, or based on rumour and speculation. Some were not even plausible, such as the claim that Levi's had "sort of patented" the style of their ads, or the wildly fluctuating estimates of Tina Turner's fee for appearing in the Pepsi ads. These flights of fantasy may lead to the accuracy of other stories told by informants being challenged. However, in a sense such concerns miss the point. Even if the stories were not true, it is interesting that informants had them to offer, that the stories were offered with confidence and authority, and in the groups, were received with interest by others. This suggests that they feel comfortable enough about the world of advertising, and confident enough about their relationship with it, to engage in gossip on the subject. Furthermore, the kind of stories which they told do not seem dissimilar from those appearing in trade journals such as Campaign, or in practitioners' own conversations.

4. SOURCES OF ADVERTISING LITERACY

In some cases, informants were quite vague about how they knew what they knew. For example, someone remembered "seeing something about that somewhere", while others referred to "hearing about" various ads. There was a strong sense that much of their understanding had been obtained by osmosis. As one informant put it,

> You don't actually sit down and go and study adverts. You're just faced with them day in day out. I think you make your own opinions of them. [male workers 21-24, mixed]

Thus, informants suggested that they learned about advertising "from the adverts themselves, rather than anything that's been taught", and that they were "wising up" to the ways products were being promoted:

> ...to a large extent, you just sit through them and watch them, and I suppose after enough time you just start to think, well, you know, what is going on? [female student 21-24]

They did, however, mention some particular sources of their advertising knowledge. Those most frequently discussed were the mass media and formal education, followed by personal experience or contacts.

4.1. The mass media

Goodyear (1991) suggests that consumers' advertising literacy may be influenced by exposure to film and television, as these provide opportunities to learn many

conventions used in advertising. This certainly seems to have been the case for young adults in this study, but they also attributed some understanding to the mass media in a more explicit way.

Television programmes were mentioned most frequently in this context. Consistent with the intertextuality of advertising and other communication forms, various informants referred to documentaries which they had seen about advertising. These examined "how ad agencies work", the use of animals or session singers in ads, Aids advertising across Europe, and various other topics. In some cases, informants watched such programmes "out of the corner of my eye", but others actually "sat and watched" them:

> There was one [a documentary] not that long ago, it was about advertising. I watched that. I think it was all about what people thought of it, what they were allowed to show, why they showed what they did. [unemployed females 21-24]

> I watched a programme once...it was the making of the Volkswagen advert...they started off with the sort of phrase at the end of it, "if only everything in life was as reliable as a Volkswagen" or something like that, and then they had lots of different ideas, you know...like unreliable things going on in their life but they've still got their Volkswagen to drive away at the end of it. [unemployed male 18-20]

In addition to documentaries, informants mentioned other programmes where advertising was featured. Thus, there were many references to the Clive James series in which ads from around the world were shown and commented upon. Others referred to television dramas which were partly set in advertising agencies. The drama series "thirtysomething" featured two characters who had set up their own advertising agency, and their business activities often formed part of the story. Similarly, the soap opera "Brookside" included a woman who worked in an advertising agency:

> ...there's a woman in "Brookside" that works in an advertising agency...And you're watching the soap like, and she's going out to work and it's all advertising and what have you. You start to think about it then. [male workers 18-20]

Indeed, another informant believed this thinking was intended by the programme-makers:

> They've got that advertising woman in it and it's just a mechanism to teach people about advertising...in "Brookside" they have a policy of, they take issues, and things like that. [male students 21-24]

Thus, informants had seen quite a range of advertising-related programmes on television. There were also many passing references to magazine or newspaper

articles about advertising:

> It's like the Guinness adverts on the telly, there was a big thing about it in a paper I was reading. And it was saying you had to have the mentality of God knows how old to be able to understand. [unemployed females 18-20]

> I was reading an article on advertising, the smoking, the beer ones and things like that. Apparently they're governed by very strict laws. [male students 21-24]

Others mentioned articles which they had read about the advertising agency Saatchi and Saatchi, about celebrities being paid "millions" for appearing in ads, or how crime may be related to advertising. Some referred to the media pages in newspapers such as The Guardian, which sometimes dealt with advertising issues:

> I tend to have a wee look at that. Not avidly, but now and again cos it's quite interesting. [female students 18-20]

One final mass media source of information on advertising was the cinema, which was mentioned by a few people. A student described the satirical film "How To Get Ahead In Advertising" as "a hoot", but then went on to say that the agency meetings shown in the film seemed quite similar to those he had seen in programmes about how advertising agencies worked. A graduate worker mentioned the comedy film Crazy People, about a copywriter who was considered insane because he "told the truth" about products, such as Volvo cars being "boxy, but they're good".

4.2. Formal education

Many informants had "vague memories" of advertising being mentioned in school. Most of these concerned Art or English classes, where they had made collages from different ads, or designed their own.

> I liked Art...you would make up your own adverts for your "O" grades and I always mind the teacher always said "You've got to have it good. They've got to be attractive, different, and just colourful as well". [female worker 21-24]

> We had to look for something bright, bold, perhaps with a touch of mystery so you have to look at it twice to understand it... [male worker 18-20]

On a broader note, another informant talked about how objects like Coke or Pepsi cans found their way into the still life arrangements which his art teacher would set up for the class to draw. He described this as

> Not so much teaching about it, but the fact it was there, reminding you about it, like. [male workers 18-20]

Several informants remembered addressing advertising issues in English classes and projects. For example,

> We once analysed ...discussed and all the rest...just sort of what was the advert trying to put across, who was it..trying to appeal to, what kind of people, was it a good thing.
>
> [female students 18-20]

One or two informants had vague memories of classes in Media Studies or Modern Studies referring to ads. Someone's drama teacher had talked about "how much it cost for this actress, just for her lips" to appear in an ad, and another informant remembered translating French ads into English.

For some informants, post-school education or training had touched on advertising. Thus, a student remembered learning in his politics course that "the advertisers are the experts in classification". An unemployed informant had been to four Media Studies classes on a youth training course, and had to create an ad from a selection of photographs. While her group "couldn't be bothered", others "came up with some good ideas":

> They were concentrating on what papers and magazines did which kind of advertising and what group of people they were trying to get their views across to and things like that.
>
> [unemployed females 18-20]

Some informants who had studied engineering or computing had also undertaken marketing or advertising projects, which had raised their awareness:

> We had to do our own advertising for a product related to the industry, and we had to draw up promotional posters...You keep on trying to compare it to adverts that you've seen before. Trying to come up with an advert that was completely different must be quite hard work.
>
> [unemployed males 21-24]

In one of the pilot groups, due to a recruitment oversight, one informant had a HNC qualification in Business Studies. His formal advertising education appeared to have been limited, however as the course

> ...brushed over marketing. They said you remember the funniest ones, the ones that relate to you.
>
> [male workers 21-24, mixed]

Thus, his contributions to discussion did not seem distinctive; for example he had no more to say than others in the role of surrogate strategist.

Finally, an unemployed informant, interviewed individually, had a Business Studies HND qualification. Her performance as a surrogate strategist was particularly convincing: she referred for example to "high awareness products" and "exposure",

and she was the one who had discussed the brand positioning strategy of Haagen Dazs. Her contributions in the roles of competent consumer or casual cognoscenti were less distinctive, although having a boyfriend who was an audiovisual technician gave her access to more specialist terminology.

4.3. Personal experience or contacts

Despite attempts to screen out informants who worked in advertising-related areas or had close friends or family who did, two students had had some closer exposure to the advertising process than had been intended. Thus, one explained that

> A relation of mine does it to get the money to make films he wants to and I've gone and spent lots of time watching it all... [female students 21-24]

Therefore, it is not surprising that when the group discussed how it was possible to tell when a lot of money had been spent on an ad, she mentioned settings and the number of people featured as useful cues. She had also expressed the view that ads were becoming more concerned with drama and telling stories rather than simply showing the product, and again this may be related to her personal experience. However, her vocabulary was not particularly specialised (for example, it was someone else in her group who had referred to the "sampling" technique used in the Ariston ad), and her contributions did not stand out from those of others. Another student had worked in a graphic design studio for a year before going to university. This experience, combined with an interest in graphics, may explain his use of terminology such as "Andy Warhol style - multiple repeated images and different colours" and his attack on the production values of the Tunnock's ad. However, at other times his language did not stretch beyond "quite classily done, a really classy photo", and again there were no other indications that his knowledge of advertising was significantly greater than that of the others.

Several informants had had some contact with people who were connected in some way to the advertising industry. Some referred to friends, or friends of friends, who were "in" or studying advertising. For example, someone's friend had had a short work experience placement in an agency. A couple of informants knew people on Communication Studies courses which covered advertising, or who worked in graphic design. Someone even knew an advertising legend:

> The woman that used to do the Shake & Vac advert, I know her son. I know her as well. [female students 18-20]

Some informants had had some contact with advertising on a small scale. For example, an unemployed informant had been involved in a small theatre company and "had to get adverts to put in the programme". Someone else was the editor of a magazine which

> ...depends completely on advertising from people who never or very rarely advertise...so what they put in the adverts tends to be very basic. Sometimes one firm has a couple of sentences written on the back of an envelope, that's your advert. [male students 21-24]

Others had had more fleeting exposure to the advertising process in action. Thus, one informant's father had written to the IBA a few times to complain about television ads, and another who worked for a large utilities company explained that as employees "we're sort of told why they're doing it or whatever". Finally, others mentioned how their understanding of advertising had been developed through other routes. For example, a student had picked up ideas about camera techniques from friends who were interested in photography. Another informant suggested that if she

> ...hadn't mixed with people through the women's group and CND and people who are aware of propaganda if you like - that's how I've been educated, through others - I would be totally ignorant of it. [unemployed female 21-24]

5. CONCLUSIONS

Three dimensions of young adults' advertising literacy have been identified and discussed in this chapter. Firstly, informants showed themselves to be competent consumers of advertising. They displayed finely-honed interpretive skills which enabled them to make sense of complex advertising imagery and messages. These skills were supported by an awareness of a wide range of advertising conventions, styles and trends. Secondly, informants' understanding extended to the advertising planning process. They were broadly aware of the process by which ads were developed. They had views on advertising objectives, target audiences, market conditions, brand positions, campaigns, media planning, and advertising effectiveness. Their understanding of such issues surpassed the practitioners' expectations and the Boston University criteria for advertising literacy (Bichan et al 1982). Indeed, taken as a whole, the young adults' views on advertising strategy quite closely approximated conventional industry wisdom, and were frequently expressed in its specialist terms. Finally, informants' understanding of advertising extended beyond what seems necessary to play the role of consumer or strategist. They

sometimes presented themselves as the casual cognoscenti, appreciating technical aspects of advertising production, aware to some extent of advertising costs, and trading background stories about the making of ads.

This is not to say that they were always "correct" or well-informed in their assessments. There were certainly occasions where their use of advertising terminology was clumsy or inaccurate. They sometimes made wild statements, such as those about the fees earned by celebrity endorsers or advertisers not being allowed to say "buy this". While they appreciated to some extent the nature of agency-client interaction, they did not appear to understand the range of ad agency roles and responsibilities: there was little reference to personnel beyond "designers" or "executives". However, such gaps in knowledge or understanding were all the more noticeable because they were so rare. Overall, informants demonstrated an impressive proficiency in their handling of the language, concepts and practice of advertising.

Various sources of such proficiency emerged in the discussions. Some informants had touched on advertising concepts at school or in post-school education or training. A few had come into more direct contact through friends, friends of friends, or activities such as editing a student magazine. While the pervasiveness of advertising is well recognised (Pollay 1986), perhaps it is still underestimated. In keeping with Fiske's (1989a,b) notion of the "leaky boundaries" between popular cultural forms, advertising appears to have seeped into the fabric of these young adults' lives through many routes, so that part of their sophistication may be explained by a process of osmosis, resulting from their numerous and cumulative encounters with ads in their everyday lives. However, such an explanation suggests a passivity on their part which does not account for their interest in stories and information about advertising in documentaries or newspaper articles, for example.

What, then, are the implications of this sophisticated understanding of advertising? At the most obvious and managerial level, it seems that advertisers targeting an audience of young adults may assume, in Lannon's (1992) terms, the highest degree of literacy and potential complicity on their part in developing ads. Brands may develop their own language, visual and verbal, and expect these consumers to be active accomplices in the process. It is in this context that the Guinness ads operate, and that the Silk Cut ads may have done before they stopped providing the necessary challenge.

This is not to suggest that all brands seeking a franchise among young adults should immediately position themselves on the highest point of Lannon's continuum of advertising styles. In the first place, such language evolves rather than arrives overnight, and it is presumably from this gradual development that the complicity and rapport between consumer and advertiser grows. Secondly, given the frequent transparency of advertisers' motives to these informants, if a brand shifts position too radically, it may simply be dismissed as "jumping on the bandwagon" or even resented for thinking it knew how to appeal. Thirdly, while we have seen informants coping with and even relishing ads at the fifth point on the continuum, simply reaching this point does not ensure marketing effectiveness. As Willis (1990) argues, and as Chapter Eight demonstrates, young adults frequently consume ads independently of the brand. Furthermore, the ability to appreciate the most complex and obscure ads presumably does not destroy all potential for enjoying well-executed ads at the lower levels - or badly executed ads, for that matter. Indeed, as we have seen, ads such as those for Sterling may be classified as "the manufacturer speaks", and yet informants enjoyed them in a sense. The Radion ads may also be classified as low-level, but some informants, thinking that they were parodies, seem to have interpreted them in a way which is consistent with higher levels. This highlights the significance of the active audience concept, and the slipperiness of consumers' response to advertising: just as a framework appears to illuminate part of that response, it slithers away from capture.

One of the practitioners expressed concern that consumers could use their advertising vocabulary and knowledge to distance themselves from ads. While he voiced this concern in the context of research settings, it raises the question of whether advertising literacy may somehow "inoculate" consumers against advertising effectiveness. The breadth and depth of advertising literacy demonstrated by the young adults in this study suggests that such immunity may be a real possibility. Raymond Williams (1962) referred to advertising as "the magic system". In this context, we can ask whether the "magic" will still work for consumers when they understand the concepts, methods and techniques of advertising, any more than it would for a magician's audiences which has worked out how the tricks are performed.

So far, we have considered the nature and origins of young adults' advertising literacy skills, and some implications for advertising practice. Given the theoretical

framework established in Chapter Four, we also need to consider how those skills are used, and to what purpose, in young adults' encounters with ads. These issues are addressed in the remaining chapters in this thesis.

CHAPTER EIGHT

ATTITUDES TO ADS AND ADVERTISING REVISITED

This chapter explores the dimensions of young adults' attitudes to ads and advertising. Following the framework established in Chapter Two, it first considers attitudes based on personal experience of ads, and then turns to attitudes to advertising as an institution.

The literature reviewed in Chapter Two indicates a great deal of ambivalence in consumers' attitudes to advertising. Three sets of tensions in the young adults' attitudes emerged in their discussion of ads, and this chapter begins by examining these. It then considers informants' attitudes to ads in different media and for different product categories, and the relationship between their attitudes to ads and brands. The chapter then considers attitudes to advertising as an institution, focusing on perceptions regarding the nature and content of advertising and its social, cultural, and economic effects. Attitudes to those working in advertising are also explored, as are perceptions of people who complain about advertising. The chapter concludes by summarising the key themes and considering their implications.

1. ATTITUDES BASED ON PERSONAL EXPERIENCE OF ADS

The young adults emerged as deeply ambivalent in their attitudes to advertising. They talked about how much they enjoyed advertising, yet they also found a great deal of it annoying or boring. They seemed to consider themselves immune to persuasion, but they also expressed a great deal of wariness with respect to advertising. Finally, they treated advertising as a distinct entity, yet one which was inherently intertextual.

1.1. Enjoyment and ennui

> In between different programmes I like watching the adverts. If there's nothing on the telly I sit and watch the adverts. [unemployed females 21-24]

Many other informants talked about how much they enjoyed advertising. The strength of their vocabulary frequently underlined their affinity with ads. Willis (1990) reports no problems in asking young adults "what's your favourite advert?". Here, there were many spontaneous references to "favourite adverts", and to particular ads being "liked", "really liked" or "loved". Such ads were often described as "great", "excellent", "brilliant", "sweet", "lovely", "clever", or "classic". This is not to say that they were well-disposed to all advertising: indeed, as we have seen, many informants were scathing in their treatment of "cardboard ads" or "studio jobs". Thus, praise was often modified by reference to "some" or "a lot" of ads. For example, a female worker said that she quite enjoyed advertising, "apart from Radion and the boring ones". Indeed,

> Everybody's got their favourite advert. Everybody's got their favourite hate of an advert.
> [female workers 21-24]

These "hates of an advert" were frequently described in no uncertain terms, ranging from "really bad" to "cringeable", "pathetic", "atrocious", "rubbish", "crap", "terrible" or "annoying". TV Quick,* the television listings magazine, was mentioned by many informants in this way:

> I think it'll go down in history as the most hated advert. I don't like that woman in it. You leave the room and you can still hear it. Oh, I hate it. [unemployed females 21-24]

The tedium of repetition also precluded informants from enjoying advertising wholeheartedly. There was a strong sense of ads being "overplayed" to the point of "saturation", and complaints about the same ads being "spun out every time", "on every morning", or being shown "about 20 times", "100 times" or even "for the thousandth time".

Although all ads were thought to "get a bit long in the tooth" eventually, some were thought to be repeated incessantly within very short periods of time. For example, a young male worker complained that an ad for Living Design window glazing was shown three times in the space of two consecutive breaks. Similarly, in the case of TV Quick,

> They put one on at the start of the adverts and they put one on at the end of the adverts. And it's the same thing, it's not like a follow-up or anything, you just know it's coming on again. It just annoys you, you sit there going "oh God". [male graduate workers 21-24]

While repetition in these cases seemed to exacerbate rather than create annoyance at particular ads, many examples were provided of good ads being overplayed. One

informant turned this on its head by observing that "all the good ones are never on that often". Another expressed mixed feelings about the Tennent's Special ads:

> I just don't like them. I don't know why. They're getting a bit old now I used to think they were funny.... In fact, I probably still think they're funny, I just think they're overused. I like the "don't drop your kegs, Willie", I thought that was funny...The ads themselves are brilliant. I'm being a bit overcritical. I don't really dislike them, I think they're funny, but I just wish they'd come up with new ones more often. [male workers 21-24, mixed]

Consistent with Krugman's (1975) theory, several people suggested that funny ads became boring after the third time or thereabouts. Even a popular Irn-Bru ad was "starting to get boring" as the advertisers had "milked it on a bit". Indeed, it was suggested that good ads suffered most from repetition:

> I suppose it's how often you watch TV, but it's like one of these ones that had a big impact on you or it's very distinct for some reason, if you see it too often you just kind of switch off and get sick of it. [female students 21-24]

In this context, someone else suggested that it was the longer ads which tended to become particularly boring with repetition. This may be related to their initial memorability, as long ads tend to be "big glossy productions". This is consistent with Burke and Edell's (1986) suggestion that attitudes to liked ads suffered more from repetition, as consumers notice them more than ads which were not liked so much. However, in line with the practitioners' views of how wearout could be reduced, several informants talked about still paying attention to ads which contained more detail or did not reveal everything immediately. For example,

> ...if you missed something in the advert, it does encourage you to watch it again. If there's a mystery in it. [male worker 18-20]

In addition to believing that many ads were "overplayed", informants felt that ads "used the same folk over and over again", either as actors or voiceovers. Their awareness of advertising styles and conventions also seemed to contribute to informants' sense of tedium, as they dismissed many ads as "predictable", "boring" or "forgettable". They also seemed to be overwhelmed by the sheer quantity of ads which they encountered, complaining that there were too many ads, that they "got sick of them", or simply let them "sort of wash over you". The tedium of much advertising for informants was highlighted by the extent to which they welcomed anything which seemed "new" or "different":

> Obviously if you've seen something an awful lot it'll start to wear itself out, whereas something fresh, you'd be more taken with. [male student 21-24]

Thus, informants were well-disposed towards ads for new products or for products which were not usually advertised. They also welcomed new advertising approaches. For example, Holsten Pils ads incorporating clips from old films were praised as being "novel" and "nice". Even the much despised Radion ads were admitted to have one saving grace: as a male graduate worker put it, "they are doing it differently, I'll give them that". Finally, new executions in a campaign were welcomed. In the case of Gold Blend ads, for example,

> I know I'll go, "oh, that's the new one" when it comes on, although I hate them.
> [male students 21-24]

Cigarette ads were also mentioned several times in this context, as they were thought to offer a variety of executions.

> I still like them because they're always coming up with new ones so you never get bored.
> [unemployed males 18-20]

As discussed in Chapter Seven, the use of several ads at the same time was recognised as a way of reducing perceptions that ads were "overplayed". Underlining the sophistication of these advertising consumers, however, a female student thought that a constant supply of new executions was a boring and predictable strategy in itself:

> Like "oh what's the next one, there's one different every week". That just gets tedious.
> [female student 18-20]

The young adults did not feel powerless when faced with the tedium of repetition, however. As an unemployed male put it, "nobody forces you to watch an advertisement or look at them". Several ways of avoiding ads were discussed. Some people timed their arrival at the cinema to coincide with the start of the film, to miss the ads "and what have you". Others listened to Radio One, the non-commercial station, to avoid ads on the radio. There were also references to ignoring magazine ads:

> I think most adverts on a single page, you can tell what it is immediately, so you just flick it over. [male workers 21-24, mixed]

Most discussion of avoidance revolved around television ads, and as Kitchen (1986) and Lee and Lumpkin (1992) found, VCR technology was used for this purpose. However, the young adults' commercial avoidance behaviour appeared to be very selective, determined by the viewing occasion and attitudes to individual ads. Thus, several people with access to video recorders said that when they were taping a

programme as they watched it, they tended to skip the ads. However, some could not be bothered to stop and start the tape in order to delete the ads. Others based their decision on the importance of the recording. For example,

> If I was taping something that I wanted to keep, if I was sitting watching it and taping it I wouldn't tape the adverts. But if I was taping something and I didn't want to keep it afterwards, I'd probably leave the adverts, cos I quite like that. [female graduate workers 21-24]

When watching programmes which they had taped in advance, informants often "flicked through", "fast-forwarded" or "shot through" ads. Sometimes, however, they forgot that they were watching a tape and had that option. The use of fast-forward (or silence) buttons also appeared to be selective. For example, a male worker fast-forwarded ads which he had seen "for the hundredth time", but stopped the tape to watch music ads, or those "like Coke or jeans". Similarly,

> I tend to fast forward and then if there's an interesting one I'll stop it, and fast forward again. And if there's another one comes on I'll stop it. [female workers 21-24]

Of course, access to video or remote control technology was not necessary to avoid television ads. Many informants described how they ignored television ads, perhaps by talking to friends, mentally "switching yourself off", or leaving the room.

> I think on the telly, adverts come on and I personally totally turn off altogether. So even if there's a really good one on I probably won't take it in. [male students 18-20]

> When they're on television, I don't usually watch them, cos I sometimes go and make myself a cup of tea, go out of the room. [female graduate workers 21-24]

While these informants did not think they watched many ads, they remembered plenty in the course of the group discussion. Indeed, as several people observed,

> You don't realise how much you do watch adverts until you talk about it.
> [unemployed females 21-24]

1.2. Invulnerability and insecurity

Referring to the "myth of personal immunity" to advertising, Pollay (1986:23) suggests that it is "a delusion for some or perhaps many or even most of the public". We have already seen that these young adults were competent and confident consumers of advertising, capable of decoding complex messages and identifying advertisers' intentions. It may be that this understanding strengthened their sense of immunity to advertising's persuasive power. They certainly appeared to consider themselves superior to others in this, as there were many references to other people

being more "gullible" or "susceptible" to persuasion:

> You buy whatever you like, you drink whatever you like, you dinnae pay any attention really. I suppose some folk do, but not me. You just do whatever you like. You just watch them cos they catch your eye. [male workers 18-20]

> Well, people like my sister are completely influenced. I don't know why. But it doesn't bother me...it just doesn't seem to affect me at all, even though I really like adverts. [female worker 18-20]

Younger people were thought to be particularly impressionable in relation to celebrity endorsement ads and "the whole razzamatazz". Older people too were thought to be less able to "see through" ads than young adults, as

> We're becoming sceptical, wiser than previous generations sort of thing. [female students 18-20]

Informants' perceived immunity to the persuasive power of advertising appeared to be related, at least in some cases, to their sense of themselves as rational beings. For example, a female graduate worker claimed to be persuaded only "by how much information they actually tell you". Similarly, in a male working group, there was some discussion about how washing-up liquid was chosen. One member of the group said that he tended to buy "the one with the advertising". Others insisted that they did not, but chose brands which were "on promotion", offering 10% extra for example. These informants presented themselves as rational, impervious to the siren call of advertising. Indeed, one took the role of archetypal economic man: he claimed to compare washing-up liquid brands according to their price per hundred grammes, and to choose the best value for money on that basis.

Perhaps reflecting informants' confidence in their ability to deal with advertising and resist persuasion, there was a sense that many ads were beneath them. Thus, various ads were described as "stupid" or "patronising", and informants often suggested that manufacturers could not seriously expect them to believe particular claims. Others were more explicit:

> They try to insult your intelligence with like "the shirt before and the shirt ten minutes later with our washing powder". It's a new shirt. [male graduate workers 21-24]

> It's the same thing, these adverts treating you like as if you're stupid or something. [male workers 21-24, mixed]

In contrast to this sense of invulnerability, the young adults expressed a great deal of wariness with respect to advertising. Their language sometimes presented advertising as an aggressive force against which people needed to defend

themselves. Thus, some informants described ads as trying to "hypnotise", "seduce" or "brainwash" people. There were also several references to advertising "ploys" and to being "hit" by ads. Similarly,

> You read a magazine, you're bombarded. You read a newspaper, you get advertising. You watch the telly, you've got advertising. You drive your car, you get advertising chucked at you. [male graduate workers 21-24]

Wariness of advertising was most commonly channelled into two main areas. Firstly, the young adults were suspicious of many product claims, and secondly, they were uneasy about the possible effects of advertising on them, or at least about what advertisers were trying to do to them.

1.2.1. Wariness of product claims

As Aaker et al (1992) point out, there is potential for advertising to generate false impressions through omission, misrepresentation or "puffery", this last route described by Burton (1978) as harmless exaggerations expressing opinions rather than making objective claims. Informants' suspicions regarding advertising claims addressed all three routes. Firstly, they were aware of what ads did not say. For example, there was no expectation that a brand's competitive weaknesses (or parity) would be admitted:

> Obviously even if some of the things arenae right, they're not going to say that...They're no going to say "there's places better than us but come here anyway". [male workers 18-20]

In terms of specific omissions, a student talked about the "con" of household detergent ads:

> I think it's washing machine powder or liquid that says "phosphate free", I think it is, and everyone goes "Oh, that's very helpful". I think on "Tomorrow's World" or something like that, someone said that there's no phosphates anyway. [male student 21-24]

There were several references to the lack of price information in ads. An unemployed informant talked about ads for a three-day sale which did not say that the prices quoted excluded tax:

> They forgot to say that on the television and they forgot to advertise it in the newspapers. They never said anything about it. It was only once you had got into the place and started to buy the stuff, you found out then. [unemployed males 21-24]

In addition to misleading omissions in ads, informants discussed overblown claims. They seemed particular tired of superlatives:

I wish someone would come on and say "this stuff stinks". Just for a change. You're fed up hearing that everything's just the best in this world, no matter what you buy.
[unemployed females 18-20]

A graduate worker talked about the Impulse body spray ads which suggested that using the spray would make women so attractive to men that even strangers would chase after them with flowers. She spoke of a friend who wrote to the manufacturers complaining that no strange men had offered her flowers when she used their product, and was sent a bouquet by the company:

That's how they get out of that one if you write in and complain.
[female graduate workers 21-24]

The question of outright deceit arose many times. One informant talked about an experience which gave him more confidence in ad claims:

I took the Pepsi challenge, chose Pepsi. It was amazing [laughter]...It was good to take it cos you always see it on TV. And you always think "oh, these things are fixed", you know.
[male workers 21-24, mixed]

Some felt protected by the law and "advertising standards and stuff":

If they're advertising a certain product to do something and it doesn't do that, they're actually breaking the law. [female graduate workers 21-24]

However, others suggested that advertisers still managed to say what they wanted, as "there's all these ways to get round" regulations. While there were several references to ads not being informative enough to tell blatant lies, there was a strong sense of people being "taken in" by advertising.

That's what I don't like about adverts. You know they're out to con you from the word go. You have to know that. [male graduate worker 21-24]

An unemployed informant talked about how ads recruiting pieceworkers were "a big con" and did not give "proper job descriptions":

...sometimes when I'm reading the newspapers I'll see, there'll be an advertisement for a job. Like "Are you between a particular age? You do not need any qualifications, you don't need any of that, but just 'phone such-and-such a person at such-and-such a number"...I would be really suspicious of those. [unemployed female 18-20]

Similarly, there were suggestions that advertisers tried to "fool people into buying", as otherwise they might not manage to sell their products. A female worker thought there was greater potential for television advertising to deceive, as people would think "they wouldn't tell lies on the telly".

1.2.2. Wariness of advertising effects

Given informants' claimed immunity to advertising's persuasive power, it is not surprising that they often denied the effect of ads on their purchases:

> I wouldnae go around a supermarket and say "I fancy that, I've seen the advert".
> [male workers 18-20]

> I've got four pairs of 501s actually, no other jeans. That's just me, nothing to do with the adverts. [unemployed females 21-24]

Many informants offered particular examples of their ability to withstand the power of advertising. These tended to be cases where the product or brand held no interest for them anyway: several informants pointed out that cigarette advertising had not turned them into smokers. Similarly,

> When I watch adverts they don't, they don't sort of influence me at all. Like the Holsten one, I don't like lager or beer but I love the advert so it doesn't make any difference.
> [female students 18-20]

While the young adults may have found such examples reassuring, they indicate little more than advertising's inability to make people do something completely against their will. A denial of advertising's brute force is not a denial of very much. In some cases, purchases resulting from ads were presented as acts of rebellion or statements of autonomy. Thus, several people talked about seeing a particular brand advertised, and then buying a cheaper own-label version in the supermarket. Another informant talked about a Levi's ad:

> "I heard it through the grapevine", that was in the charts just after that. And I bought the record after that, from seeing it on the advert. I didn't buy the jeans, I bought the record [laughter].
> [unemployed females 21-24]

However, quite a few people did admit to being influenced by ads in more conventional ways on occasion. Indeed, an unemployed male suggested that "everybody" has bought something as a result of seeing it advertised. Food ads, especially those for confectionery and soft drinks, were thought to have the most immediate and dramatic impact:

> I think the Mars ones are good. It doesn't really matter what they've got in it. You just see them opening a Mars bar and you think "oh yeah!" [female workers 18-20]

Various informants said that they had bought music albums, jeans, alcohol, cosmetics, and books after seeing them advertised. Others referred to visiting sales or taking up a special offer, and to buying new products. Reflecting their

understanding that ads are not necessarily intended to achieve immediate sales, the young adults also admitted being influenced in less direct ways, such as "going for products that you recognise":

> ...you like a little bit of familiarity with what you're buying, so if you sort of buy something that you've seen on the telly, you feel a bit more secure with it. [unemployed females 21-24]

Several people discussed how advertising had influenced their perceptions of a brand's quality. For example, there was a lengthy discussion about the relative quality of various disposable razor brands in one group. Someone claimed to use Gillette because it was better than other brands. When another member of the group asked him why he thought it was better, he tried to rationalise his preference and then admitted:

> Being honest, when I go into a supermarket, you see Wilkinson Sword and you see Gillette. And there's only one reason that I think I pick up Gillette more than I pick up Wilkinson Sword, and that's because they advertise a lot on the telly and Wilkinson Sword don't.
> [male graduate workers 21-24]

Ads were also thought to have an effect in enhancing the image or positioning of a brand. For example,

> Many a time I've been at the train station coming home from Paisley with a hangover, and there's Coke and Lucozade. And I've thought "Lucozade, that'll give me energy"
> [unemployed females 21-24]

Perhaps as a result of their understanding that advertising may have indirect as well as direct effects, informants sometimes mentioned the possibility that they might be underestimating its power:

> I think it's probably a lot more subtle than you think. I think you probably are influenced by it. It's just because you don't like to admit that you're being manipulated, you know.
> [female students 21-21]

Ironically, such wariness was frequently expressed by those who had appeared the most confident in their ability to "see through" advertising. Thus, a student who complained that advertising often insulted his intelligence also thought that

> Advertising is basically very manipulative. They're trying to say "our product's better than anyone else's", and very little of it is actually an evaluative judgment, they never give you any facts...I want to know what they're trying to do to me. [male students 18-20]

Another male student suggested that humour in advertising was an attempt "to prey on your mind". Several informants referred to possible "subliminal" effects of advertising, and how it might work "at the back of your mind". Others suggested that

ads might eventually take effect "even if they don't capture your consumerism now". Once again, words such as "subliminal", "prey", and "capture" suggest a great deal of wariness with respect to advertising. An informant with an interest in psychology suggested that "adverts have got to do with conditioning":

> It's like Pavlov's dogs, you know. Imprinting on the mind. If you ring the bell often enough you'll start slavering and it's like gradually, the image is built into your head and you associate it with certain things. [unemployed female 21-24]

Indeed, earlier in the interview, she had talked about how she would prefer to buy After Eight mints rather than "Safeway's own", as she "would go for the quality brand".

1.2.3. Unwillingness to take ads at face value

Perhaps informants' sophistication, combined with their wariness, explains their reluctance to accept ads at face value. There were many instances of people interpreting an ad in one way, and then trying to look at it from another perspective, or even catching themselves out:

> You think "oh that's a wee bit different". And then you think "that's a really obvious point, being really different". [female students 21-24]

In some cases they were simply not sure whether they could believe their eyes. For example, an unemployed female doubted that the character shown auditioning for a band in a Coke ad* was really playing the guitar with a Coke bottle. Someone else was unsure about a trainer ad which showed a man running and jumping along the top of a high-rise construction:

> I just found it very good the way it was shot, because it really looks...I mean you see him jumping, and he couldn't possibly be jumping that high up. It's quite well done, it makes you believe he is, although you know in the back of your mind that it's not possible.
> [female workers 18-20]

It appears that in this case, she could have believed her eyes: at a 1990 Market Research Society seminar entitled "Researching the new creativity", a creative director said that there was no trick photography in this ad, as the runner was an extremely agile and sure-footed Navajo Indian.

In another group, there was some discussion about the authenticity of "vox pop" style ads, where "ordinary people" are asked their opinion of particular brands:

> - They're also poor acting, you know, it's not very persuasive.

- Well, it's because they're using the public, it's because they're not actors...
- You'd have to be an absolutely brilliant actor to get away with it though, because the acting's so bad. [male workers 21-24, mixed]

In other cases, informants' uncertainty about how to take an ad was based on their confusion about the advertiser's motives. The Radion "home-video" ads were the most frequently discussed in this context. There was no doubt in anyone's mind that the ads looked "horrific" and "home-made", but they were considered "too amateur" for a company with such "backing" to make. Thus, although you were "meant to think that it was one of the family" behind the camera,

> I think it's so bad it has to be professionally done, to be perfectly honest. I don't think they got it that wrong... [male worker 21-24]

> I think it's so bad, it's like, as I say, it's making fun of ordinary Persil Automatic. [female graduate workers, 21-24]

> If they weren't a joke, it was pretty sad. They really were horrific. [male student 21-24]

1.3. Distinct identity, intertextual entity

On the one hand, informants seemed to see advertising as a distinct entity deserving of attention and perhaps respect in its own right. As a male student observed, "they're so professional now, the 30 seconds are so well-made". Indeed, as the practitioners had suggested, ads were compared favourably to television programmes on many occasions:

> A lot of the adverts are very entertaining in their own right...I look forward to seeing some of the adverts. [male workers 21-24, mixed]

> I normally end up watching the adverts, cos they're better than half the programmes on the telly. [female worker 21-24]

Consistent with perceptions of advertising as a distinct entity, a female student talked about how she loved to see how different companies would advertise at Christmas. Another informant described how he regretted missing an opportunity to see a review of ads:

> I believe down in London last summer, I missed it and I really wanted to go and see it, the National Film Theatre was showing seven and a half hours of the best adverts of all time, constantly. Maybe an hour, and then a quarter of an hour break...I think that would have been brilliant. They had all the famous adverts of all time, all the early Hamlet ones, all the Guinness ones. [male student 21-24]

The willingness of an institution such as the National Film Theatre to screen seven

and a half hours of ads suggests an appreciation of advertising's distinct cultural identity. This is highlighted by the student's view of what the event would be like ("maybe an hour, and then a quarter of an hour break"). There is a certain irony in the idea of taking a break from a screening of ads. Such an arrangement must represent the ultimate accolade for material created for a commercial break, and it indicates how far advertising has travelled from being "just a space to be filled". This is reinforced by the reference to the "best adverts of all time" and other descriptions of various ads as "classics".

Furthermore, references to "classics", "famous adverts of all time" and "the early Hamlet ones" suggest that the young adults saw advertising as having more than a transient existence. Indeed, a sense of advertising's history was evident in many comments. As we have already seen, informants talked about various trends in advertising. There were also references to "old adverts when they had black and white television", to Guinness's sixty-year reputation for humorous ads, and to the use of a puppy in Andrex ads "for so long now, so many years". Even discussion of particular ads was not limited to those currently in circulation.

- Have you ever seen Hovis?
- Aye, the Hovis bread one.
- The old ones? That's an old one, that.
- Yeah, that's quite old. [male workers 21-24, mixed]

Similarly, one student remembered a public service ad from his childhood, and another mentioned that her favourite ad had not been shown "for five years". In a male working group, when Irn-Bru's "rip-off" approach was discussed, someone remembered "one a couple of years ago that did that". Someone else described Shake & Vac as "the only advert which is on telly now that's over ten years old". Indeed, on some occasions, the young adults added to their repertoire the role of advertising archaeologists, dating the artefacts which they had dug up from their memories:

- Smith's Crisps. The thing is that was about five years ago.
- No, you still see them.
- Occasionally.
- It wasn't as far back as that. Maybe two years ago? [female students 18-20]

Advertising's future as well as its past was also contemplated on some occasions:

- I wonder what they'll be like in a hundred years.
- Yeah. Epics. Three hour films. Imagine that, a three hour film to sell a product!

[unemployed males 18-20]

Those Hamlet adverts will be seen in a couple of years time as "Oh, that old thing". You know, like it's so boring. [female students 18-20]

In fact, Hamlet ads have been spared this fate due to the removal of cigar advertising from television, causing another student to remark "that's the end of an era, I suppose".

In addition to perceptions of advertising as an entity which changed over time, there was also a sense of it varying across cultures. Many informants talked about how different advertising was in other countries. As we have seen, they distinguished between "Scottish", "English" and "American" ads. While there was some discussion of Scottish ads being cheaper and less professional than English ones, British ads were also compared to those from other countries.

I don't know if you watch Clive James. And he has adverts from different places. That's really good...It's quite good to see the different adverts that they have. [female workers 21-24]

Many informants seemed to find the American "hard sell" ads very entertaining from a British perspective. For example,

I like the sort of "buy this or money back". All of them are like that. They're funny but they're not meant to be. But like, from watching them here to watching them there, then you can see the funny side. [female workers 18-20]

American advertising was also thought to be more intrusive. Thus, several informants mentioned that there were more advertising breaks in American television programmes, and that they even occurred between the titles and the programme. Indeed,

- In America they changed the rules of American football to fit the adverts in...
- ...the lobby was so strong that they managed to change the entire rules of the game that had been going for 60 years. Adverts every 10 minutes, not every 15.
- I don't think they would get away with that in Britain... [male students 21-24]

Thus, the young adults often exuded an air of superiority when talking about American ads and advertising, making many comments along the lines of "you wouldn't get away with that sort of thing over here". Given the dominance of other forms of American popular culture (particularly those aimed at the youth market such as film and music), it may be that the young adults' condescending laughter at American ads is in part a reaction to the American domination of other spheres of their experience.

While British advertising was most commonly compared to its American

counterpart, there was some discussion of advertising from other countries. Several people talked about having seen Australian or Japanese ads on Clive James's television programme, and a few talked about ads from other parts of Europe. Australian ads were thought to be similar to those in America:

> There's a lot more of the cheap, tacky ones about. You know, Jimmy Bloggs, standing in his warehouse going "We've got 30% off this, come on down!". There was very few well thought-out adverts. [male student 21-24]

Discussion of European ads tended to focus on issues of taste, particularly in relation to gender and sexual matters. For example,

> I suppose we're quite lucky. Clive James did a programme of all these adverts from all over the world and there was some really sort of pornographic bra adverts in France...
> [female graduate workers 21-24]

Some male informants did not make the distinction between British and other European advertising in quite the same way, suggesting that people were "more open-minded" or less prone to "censorship" in other countries.

While the young adults appear to treat advertising as a entity with its own historical and cultural identity, there was a sense that they allowed it to hold this position as long as it did not shout about it: if it took itself too seriously, or expected its audience to do so, it would be put firmly back in its place:

> - They advertise the Gold Blend ones now, when they're going to be on...
> - It told you they were going to be on I think Wednesday night at eight o'clock and watch it.
> - It's ridiculous, all that hype for an advert. [female workers 21-24]

> In the paper yesterday they had a big article saying they finally get it together, and it's these two on an advert. I'm not interested in whether they get it together or not.[female workers 18-20]

This suggests that while advertising may have its own distinctive identity, it played a minor role in people's lives:

> You just watch them if you like them, you know. You dinnae go to bed worrying about it kind of thing. [male workers 18-20]

However, the liveliness of the discussions about advertising, the amount of detail and the strength of language used to describe various ads suggest that it was not an altogether insignificant part of their daily lives. This was reinforced by their treatment of advertising as a valid topic of conversation, which relates back to the Bauer and Greyser (1968) criteria for salience. Indeed, there were many passing references to previous conversations about advertising:

That's what my flatmate says about the washing powder ones. [female graduate workers 21-24]

It's talked about in the pub so that's probably a good sign. [male student 21-24]

Although the young adults treated advertising as a distinct entity, their experience of it was inherently intertextual. They described advertising in terms of other cultural forms, often identifying the "sources" of particular advertising approaches. They discussed how their experience and expectations of particular ads were shaped by knowledge of the source material, and how advertising was recycled in other forms of popular culture. These issues are discussed in turn below.

1.3.1. Descriptions of ads in relation to other texts

Among others, Williamson (1978) and McCracken (1986, 1987) point out that we must use our general social and cultural knowledge to make sense of ads. Certainly, the young adults' descriptions drew on a great deal of knowledge of the world beyond advertising. Their references to the source of inspiration for ads may be categorised using Cook's (1992) distinction between intra- and inter-discoursal allusions, as ads were thought to draw on other ads as well as films, television programmes and so on.

When informants referred to ads evoking knowledge of other ads, they tended to mention imitations or parodies. For example, the Gold Blend ads were "the same sort of idea as the Cointreau adverts", while the Gordon's Gin ads were "trying to copy the cigarette adverts, this surrealist approach". As we have seen, informants discussed parodies of particular ads or advertising styles, such as Harp's "mickey-take" of Gold Blend, and Irn-Bru's "skit" on the Coke and Pepsi approach. There was even an example of what Wernick (1991) terms "self-conscious and self-referencing intertextuality": an ad for the Royal Bank of Scotland was described as "taking the mickey out of themselves", as

...they actually had an advert of them, of the actual advertisers trying to make up an advert. [female students 18-20]

The young adults also identified other cultural forms as sources of ideas for particular ads. We have seen how they recognised music "taken" by ads and used to build an atmosphere or mood, or to tell a story. Consistent with Unwin's (1982) discussion of "transferred style" in advertising, they also recognised films, television programmes, and various genres as the source of ideas for ads. Thus, there were many parallels drawn between ads and films, as "big glossy productions" were

thought to have "a sort of filmy look". Indeed, describing a McEwan's ad, one informant commented

> It's a very serious movie actually. Movie - what am I talking about? Advert!
> [male worker 18-20]

Others made more specific references to films. In addition to the Tennent's Special ads being compared to "The Blues Brothers", a Marlboro magazine ad was compared to a scene in "Casablanca", and an ad for the Australian Tourist Board was thought to be in the style of Indiana Jones films. An ad for Budweiser beer was described as invoking "King Kong":

> It was King Kong, but instead of clinging to the Empire State Building, it was clinging to a bottle of Budweiser. It was really smart. It was exactly like the film...[male workers 21-24, mixed]

Turning to television formats, the Gold Blend ads were compared to "soap operas" or "mini-series", while ads for Red Rock cider were "done in a sort of detective spoof sort of way". The Lurpak ads* featured a claymation figure based on "wee Morph that used to be on Tony Hart, "Take Hart", a children's art programme. Several informants also suggested that Jeremy Beadle's candid-camera style television programmes had inspired the Radion "home video" ads:

> They've sat down and looked at that programme and thought "we'll do that because the programme is getting a lot of people watching it in the ratings", and they've jumped on that idea. [unemployed males 18-20]

Several people also mentioned the world of art as a point of reference for ads. We have seen how a student referred to an ad as "multiple repeated images, Andy Warhol style". Similarly, a Persil poster looked like a painting "in Gauguin style", and there was some discussion of a Guinness ad* which was based on famous paintings. For example,

> - The one with the paintings. He's going through the Old Masters, the paintings, taking bits..
> - Van Gogh and all that. [male workers 18-20]

Print formats and genres were also recognised as a source of ideas for advertising. Thus, a Tetley tea ad was designed to look like a problem page in a magazine, and a Kit-Kat ad borrowed the Andy Capp cartoon character. There were even some references to Shakespeare: one informant liked an ad which featured "the three witches from Macbeth", and another talked about a "Hamlet character" kicking a skull about.

1.3.2. Experience of ads influenced by knowledge of other texts

The young adults frequently described how their experience of a particular ad was coloured by their knowledge of other texts. Thus, at what Cook (1992) would call the intra-discoursal level, experience of one ad sometimes enhanced or detracted from their appreciation of another:

> And when they brought out the one taking the mickey out of Gold Blend, it was really relevant as well because you were so fed up with the Gold Blend adverts. [female students 18-20]

> I used to think the Coke one was a brilliant advert. When you saw the Irn-Bru ones you saw the funny side of it. [unemployed females 21-24]

Such influence was not limited to parodies, however. Wernick (1991) discusses how ads later in a campaign may require knowledge about earlier executions for the audience to understand them. Thus, there were several comments along the lines of "if you didn't know what it was, you wouldn't know what it was". Similarly, someone described another Guinness ad*:

> ...he's sitting in a really loud bar and there's lots of colours going around and he's wearing a jazzy outfit with a huge cocktail and he goes "Don't worry, it's just a nightmare". And if you didn't know about the other adverts, you'd think "What is he talking about? What is he advertising here?" [male graduate worker 21-24]

Experience of texts beyond the world of advertising also influenced the young adults' experience of ads. Thus, a student described how the Hamlet World Cup ad was "just so perfect", and "really funny", as it interrupted the actual football matches which she found boring. Other people talked about how they enjoyed seeing the Blues Brothers "carrying on" in the Tennent's Special ads, although some did not like to see the film appropriated simply to give the beer "a young image". The effectiveness of Nick Kamen, the star of the Levi's "Laundrette" ad, was undermined for some informants by his appearances outside the world of advertising:

> When you first saw him on the advert you think "oh, he's really nice". And then when you saw his picture in the Jackie you thought he was a bit girly-looking. [female workers 21-24]

> Nick's thick [laughter]. He was on "The Tube" or something. They had answers written out....They asked him question number five and he answered answer number four... [male graduate workers 21-24]

It was, however, knowledge of celebrities and music which was most discussed as influencing the ways in which ads were experienced. We have seen how celebrity ads were categorised according to the degree of "fit" between the endorser and the

product or brand. Informants' ability to do this was based on their knowledge of what the celebrity represented beyond the world of advertising. In this context, there was much discussion of how Rutger Hauer's film roles resonated with his portrayal of the Guinness man, in that he was "cool", "mysterious", and even "clinical and chilling". However, an unemployed female was unable to reconcile his Guinness persona with the "bad man" he played in "The Hitcher". There were many other explicit references to the interdependence between celebrity endorsements and their other activities. For example, when the comic actors Stephen Fry and Hugh Lawrie featured in an Alliance and Leicester Building Society ad,

> Right away I saw them and I thought "This will be funny", so I sat down and I watched the advert. I could relate to it, them, because I watched their series. I thought they were really funny in "Blackadder". [female students 18-20]

There was also much discussion of the interdependence of music and ads. Thus, a male student appreciated the use of Handel's "Water Music" in the water privatisation campaign. Many others talked about enjoying ads which featured well-liked tracks. For example,

> Is it the new Crunchie advert, I love that because I love the song attached to it. "I'm so excited" is the song and it's a really good song, so I enjoy the advert.[unemployed females 18-20]

Recognising and liking the music did not always enhance the young adults' experience of ads using it. For example, one informant was unhappy with Tina Turner appearing in a Pepsi ad:

> See when she done that, she just put herself right down. She had a history, a legend, like a rock legend... [unemployed males 18-20]

Several informants expressed concern about a track from The Clash being featured in a Levi's ad. As one informant put it,

> To me that was a brilliant song....But now it's just like, I suppose, a bit of a sell-out. The Clash is supposed to be this punk group that was standing against the establishment...
> [male graduate workers 21-24]

1.3.3. Ads feeding back into popular culture

The young adults also discussed the ways in which ads fed back into other cultural forms. In the first place, they described how other texts sometimes took advertising as their subject matter. As we have seen, they commented that television programmes such as "Brookside" featured people working in advertising agencies.

They had also encountered information about ads in the mass media. For example, in the case of the Gold Blend couple,

- It took two years for them to kiss or something. And it had big write-ups in the paper and everything...
- It was splattered! I think it made front page material in The Sun. [male workers 18-20]

Another way in which advertising became the subject matter in other media forms was through parody. Several people referred to television or radio programmes which "ripped off" particular ads. Thus, a Jasper Carrot series on BBC1 featured a "commercial break" in the middle of each programme, during which the comedian would "take the mickey out of adverts". Another comedy programme parodied the Flake ads* featuring attractive women in seductive poses. The sketch featured a man and his "really fat girlfriend":

> And he's taking pictures of her for a magazine. And he says "look seductive" and sticks a Flake in her mouth. And it goes everywhere! [female workers 18-20]

As well as providing subject matter for other texts, advertising was thought to be capable of influencing them. For example, a male worker thought that the Scottish band Hipsway had benefited from featuring in a McEwan's ad, as "if it weren't for the advert they wouldn't really be well known at all". Similarly, many people commented on the success of re-released music when it featured in an ad for Levi's. Indeed, it was suggested that this could revive an old band's career, and that Levi's could "dictate what's happening in the charts":

> The adverts started a sort of trend, you know. Everyone bought that music again. Sixties groups are amazingly popular now, all over again. [male workers 21-24, mixed]

> More and more you've got these old songs that keep coming into the charts. And you think "why?". And then you think "oh, it's because of that advert". [female students 18-20]

Experience of ads shaped the ways in which the young adults experienced other cultural forms, particularly in the case of music. For example, a male student commented "they put on Mozart, and you'll be going oh, cigars, coffee", and a female graduate worker observed that the classical music used in the Hovis ads "is the Hovis song now". Another informant commented had really liked the Clash track prior to its use in the Levi's ad*, but

> I suppose every time I hear it I think of snooker now, and leaning across the table in tight jeans [laughter]. [female students 18-20]

Several people felt that when an ad "took" music which they had liked, the music

tended to get "overplayed" and popular with new audiences, which spoiled their enjoyment of it somewhat. This was particularly the case when "teenyboppers" or "kiddies" developed an interest in bands which informants liked to think they had discovered themselves.

More positively, another student felt that the use of "classic" tracks in ads gave them fresh meaning for her. She drew a parallel with the Righteous Brothers' music for the film "Ghost". Before she had seen the film,

> ...I heard the song and I thought "I don't really like that, it does nothing for me". Then I went and saw the film and I sort of connected it with the tune. And I thought it was such a nice song after that. [female student 18-20]

This last comment is a particularly good illustration of the interconnectedness of advertising experiences and other aspects of the young adults' lives. The comment addresses how the meaning of a song is changed by its placement in a commercial context. Furthermore, the point is illustrated by an experience taken from yet another cultural form.

1.3.4. Leaky boundaries

Wernick (1991:121) argues that as a result of the interdependence between commerce, the media and entertainment, consumers are "engulfed...in a swirling stream of signifiers" at the vortex of promotional signs. In this study, several comments indicated some confusion at the "leaky boundaries" between advertising and other cultural forms. For example,

> - Have you seen the adverts for the lion? He went around with a tape recorder and taped what people said and he made these wee plasticine things...I don't really know what it was for, but it was about people in zoos, animals in zoos, what they thought...
> - It wasn't actually an advert, it was just like a cartoon, it was a short.
>
> [unemployed males 18-20]

Here, one member of the group had confused a short film, "Creature Comforts", on which the Heat Electric ads* were based, with the ads themselves. He was not the only one to confuse ads and other material. Thus, a male worker, looking through GQ, a men's magazine, commented that "it's hard to tell what's an ad in here or not". Similarly,

> Another advert that really annoys me in magazines, it's like the Problem Page, and you think it is the Problem Page and you start reading it. [female worker 21-24]

Indeed, someone was gripped with what might be seen as postmodern panic at the leaky boundaries between popular music and advertising:

> Is it the advert that's advertising the song, or the song that's meant to be advertising the advert, you know? Which way round is it supposed to be? [male worker 21-24, mixed]

There were also several indications that the young adults could cope remarkably well with life at the vortex, in that they could work their way through various levels and cross-references of representation. For example, a male student mentioned in passing that for some "classic" music tracks, "what's become the video of the song is the advert". Someone else described an ad which he had seen on a Clive James programme about advertising:

> It was an American advert, I can't remember, it might have been a toy. And it started off a really boring, long type thing. And then this little duck walked across it. It was like he was invading other people's adverts and they were taking the piss out of sort of stereotype adverts and they were using that to promote their own product. I thought that was pretty impressive.
> [male graduate workers 21-24]

Thus, he did not bat an eyelid when talking about an ad which he understood to be a parody of other ads, and which had come to his attention on a television programme which took advertising as its subject matter. It is a pity he did not remember what the ad was for, as this could have really impressed him. It was for Ever Ready's Energizer battery, and the "little duck" was in fact the battery-operated toy which featured in many of Duracell's ads. Thus, the ad poked fun at stereotyped ads with a character borrowed from its main competitor.

A final example of informants' ease with leaky boundaries is offered by their enjoyment of two Castella ads* featuring Russ Abbot and Des O'Connor. The first ad showed Russ Abbot on a fishing trip. Instead of using a fishing rod, he simply placed a Des O'Connor record on a turntable and lowered it into the water. The record somehow proceeded to play, and this apparently distressed the fish so much that they leaped out of the water to be gathered up by Russ Abbot. This ad was recognised as drawing on several other texts. In the first place, informants identified the character as the comedian Russ Abbot, and associated him with his television series. Furthermore, they thought his character in the ad was consistent with his television image:

> That's the way he entertains, so he comes across in the adverts much the same.
> [unemployed females 21-24]

Secondly, they related this ad to others in the Castella campaign, and spoke of how

they generally showed the Russ Abbot character devising innovative schemes for making life easier for himself. Indeed, a male worker summed up the campaign as "Castella, smoke one of these and you'll get a brainstorm". Thirdly, informants recognised Des O'Connor, and appreciated that the ad was making fun of his singing. Thus, some comments tapped into the performer's almost mythic status as the butt of many British light entertainment jokes:

- The Russ Abbot ones, you see him fishing and he sticks in a Des O'Connor record and all the fish start jumping out...
- Poor Des, what'll he say about that? [laughter] [female workers 21-24]

Another Castella ad features Des O'Connor poking fun at Russ Abbot in return, and informants appreciated that this was a revenge match:

> One of the later adverts, he's firing at Russ Abbot's records, Des O'Connor's shooting Russ Abbot records. [unemployed females 21-24]

> ...the ongoing saga of Russ Abbot slagging off Des O'Connor and his records. The last one, when he's shooting clay pigeons. He's, Russ Abbot takes out a big elephant gun and shoots the things. And you see over the divider, the guy slinging them out is Des O'Connor, with a Russ Abbot record. So they bring out the counter-attack. It must cost them a fortune to hire these celebrities. [male worker 18-20]

Thus, while there was some confusion over who was shooting the records, there was no doubt that the ad involved Des O'Connor making fun of Russ Abbot in return. These interpretations of the second ad, then, draw on knowledge of the two personalities and their monetary value, the Castella campaign in general, and an earlier ad in the campaign.

An ability to cope with leaky boundaries does not equate with acceptance, however. As one informant put it,

> I mean, it's like everything, advertising. I mean, sooner or later, even though an idea may be sort of virgin, maybe pure, someone is going to take it and use it to sell something. That's just a fact of life....No matter how you try and keep things secret and sacred and lovely, it just doesn't happen. [unemployed female 21-24]

1.3.5. Advertising as a pervasive entity

We have already seen how much of the young adults' advertising literacy appeared to have been acquired by osmosis, as they were "faced with them day in day out". Indeed, a male graduate worker referred to being "bombarded" by ads from all quarters. The repetitive nature of much advertising also contributed to a sense of its constant presence in their lives. Thus, talking about ads which annoyed her, a female

student described them as "omnipresent, they're always there".

The intertextual nature of informants' advertising experiences seemed to heighten their sense of its pervasiveness, as it could crop up in so many different contexts. There were many comments regarding the pervasiveness of advertising, in various forms. For example, a male worker went out to buy a B.B. King single after hearing it on a Levi's ad, and found that the record cover showed the ad rather than the artist. Similarly,

> Adverts are such a big part of your life. They are. It's quite amazing. I mean wherever you go, you're bound to see an advert, even if you don't realise. I mean, that ashtray up there [points to branded ashtray on mantlepiece in room], it's just an advert, isn't it? Wherever you go, it's still an advert. [female students 18-20]

> - How can you actually stop someone from seeing adverts?
> - Blindfold them, deafen them, tie their hands, I dunno. [male workers 21-24, mixed]

This last suggestion is perhaps the most telling. Blindfolding and deafening people may well prevent them from exposure to ads, although it is hardly a long-term solution. However, there was a belief that even that would not be enough, that advertising would somehow still seep through into a person's consciousness. The act of tying someone's hands to screen out advertising would achieve nothing, but the very ludicrousness of the idea underlines the futility of any attempt to avoid advertising.

Indeed, this issue was considered many times from personal experience during the drafting of this chapter, as advertising in one guise or another kept invading what was supposed to be leisure time. Thus, in the space of three weeks in March 1993, the researcher came across a television programme covering an advertising awards event and newspaper articles referring to the advertising campaigns of Benetton, Volkswagen, and Renault respectively (Chaudhary 1993; Donegan 1993; Hall 1993). A novel bought to provide a break from work turned out to be partly set in an advertising agency (Maupin 1980), and even a visit to the hairdresser provided no escape: Radio One, the non-commercial station, was on in the salon, and a "news bulletin" reported a trip to America by "the Gold Blend woman".

An interview with David Bowie in the New Musical Express (Sutherland 1993:13) also turned to advertising. The title track of his new album, "Black tie white noise" begins with a reference to "getting my facts from a Benetton ad". Asked why he mentioned Benetton in the song, Bowie replied

> Because I thought it was dodgy when Spike Lee did a thing for them. Y'know, I felt that reading about race relations through a Benetton advert was almost an insult.

When this album was previewed in The Independent on Sunday (Thompson 1993), no mention was made of the Benetton issue, but advertising was still mentioned twice: the approach which would be taken in advertising the album was explained, and one of the tracks was described as

> ...not a return to the brass-tacks Sixties nostalgia of "Pin-ups", but a lush reworking influenced by Bobby McFerrin's Cadbury's adverts (p 24).

Here again, there is evidence of leaky boundaries: not only does it appear that music from an ad influenced a track in a rock album, but this is reported in another medium, that of a newspaper. A visit to a local card shop confirmed the leakiness of the boundaries between advertising and other texts. A birthday card was bought from a series which detailed the events of particular years. The 1954 card mentioned events such as Marlon Brando winning an Oscar for "On the Waterfront". On the back of the card, there was a Guinness ad featuring the toucan once synonymous with the brand: apparently 1954 marked the start of that association. A look through the general cards in the shop uncovered the card reproduced in Figure 8.2. Its humour relies on consumers recognising and enjoying the direct reference to the Andrex ads*. Furthermore, cards are for sending, so anyone buying the card must also expect those receiving it to appreciate the joke.

While the researcher was obviously sensitised to advertising references, none of these encounters was sought out. The diversity of contexts and media in which advertising was mentioned supports the young adults' perceptions of advertising as pervasive and their belief that much of their advertising knowledge was acquired by osmosis. In the situations described above, there were references to the length and style of ads, the rationale for and history of various campaigns, and the social consequences of advertising. Over time, it appears that there is indeed scope for people to absorb a great deal of information and ideas about advertising in the course of their everyday actions.

Figure 8.1. Greeting card: "Man's Best Friend"

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1.4. Attitudes to advertising in different media

In line with practitioners' expectations, television emerged as the primary advertising medium and dominated the young adults' discussion of advertising. Even when asked about ads in other media, they tended to mention a couple, and return very quickly to television ads. Television also appeared to be their reference point for advertising. Thus, when ads in other media were discussed, this was often in relation to television. For example, a female student described the Gordon's Gin campaign as "two-dimensional", and added "it's not, I mean, shown on television". Similarly, a female worker had seen Tennent's Special posters, "but I haven't seen the actual adverts". A male worker talked about the television version of those ads, commenting that "they've got good follow-up in the newspaper". There were some instances of "phantom attribution". For example,

> - What about the one for Southern Comfort or something on the telly?
> - No, that's the one that's in the pictures. [female workers 18-20]

The dominance of television ads in discussion became a talking point on several occasions. Some informants explained that it was easier to focus on television ads in a group discussion, because there was a greater chance that people would be familiar with the same ones. Television also dominated discussion of ads in the individual interviews, however. Putting ads such as those for Sterling to one side, a student suggested that

> It's fairly elitist, the stuff that gets on television...it's top of the range in the market stuff, you know. I mean, you're not going to see "Co-op washing liquid is really cheap, so buy it cos it's cheap". [male student 18-20]

In general, however, the salience of television ads seemed to be bound up with a sense of these as common property, "provoking the most discussion amongst your friends":

> ...it's something that you've seen on your own but other people have seen as well...you know they'll have seen it. Whereas I mean, it's such a wider audience than say you know, Cosmopolitan or Marie Claire...I mean I wouldn't dream of saying, like, "Did you see that advert in that magazine?". I don't know why. But it's also because TV is such a livelier media whereas magazine pages give a static image... [female student 21-24]

Magazines were the most discussed print medium. Some informants thought they gave magazine ads very little attention, describing them as not very "visual" or "striking", and suggesting that there was very little which could be done with a one page ad. Others described some magazine ads as using "awfully striking pictures",

and "clever" headlines:

> ...it's usually the picture that sells it...if they grab your attention with the picture, then you're more likely to read what it says. But otherwise you're likely just to flick through it.
> [female graduate workers 21-24]

> Good adverts tend to be magazine adverts. There's one cigarette on a background, and it says "it gets through 40 a day". I thought that was quite clever. [male graduate workers 21-24]

Several informants also mentioned the relative longevity of magazine ads, pointing out that as they may look through a magazine a few times, they could notice the same ad more than once. Women's magazines were described as containing ads mainly for make-up, perfume, and "all kinds of things to make yourself look good". While many female informants liked the ads and models in "glossy magazines", several complained that the advertised products were out of their reach. In some cases, this was due to their cost: a female graduate worker complained that half the products advertised in magazines such as Cosmopolitan were "away out of my price range". Furthermore,

> A lot of the adverts are for shops in London as well. I mean you couldn't even get them up here which is pointless. [female graduate workers 21-24]

Some informants felt overwhelmed by the amount of advertising in magazines. Thus, a male student thought that "far too many magazines are adverts, too little content". Similarly,

> I think a lot of people tend to skip over them in magazines because there's so many of them in one magazine that you get a bit bored after a while. [female workers 21-24]

However, another member of that group said that she bought certain magazines mainly because she liked looking at the ads, and someone else mentioned reading even the magazine inserts. Similarly, a male graduate worker thought that his friend bought magazines such as GQ and Sky for their clothes ads rather than their editorial content.

Cinema ads met with a mixed reception. Several people mentioned that these were sometimes "like more or less TV advertisements", but "longer versions", "with bits added in". Many talked about how they enjoyed the Gordon's Gin ads, and would be "waiting for the punchline". Indeed,

> The whole audience actually like - well, as far as I can tell - they like that advert. I really like it as well. [male worker 18-20]

Despite this, the young adults' initial references to cinema ads were often less than

complimentary, as they associated these mainly with local and low-budget efforts. Thus, cinema ads were commonly described as "hideously bad", "a load of rubbish", "awful", "crude", "silly" or "pathetic".

> They're always crude, aren't they? "Go to this place after you've watched this picture". [female workers 21-24]

Indeed, someone remembered a comedy programme which had suggested

> ...if you wanted to ruin your opponent's business, just put an advert for it in the cinema, cos they're all so naff and tacky it's hilarious. [male graduate worker 21-24]

Cinema ads were also thought to be "overplayed" and rarely changed, to the extent that a female worker was sure the same ad for a local pizza restaurant had been showing since she was about five years old.

While some cinema ads were admired, and informants often "tried to see the funny side" of the "hideously bad" ones, radio advertising was thought to have no saving graces. It was considered particularly intrusive, as

> It's like a break in the music, it's no the same as a break in the TV. Cos some of the adverts are quite good on the telly. Whereas with the radio you cannae make sense of them. [male workers 18-20]

The intrusiveness was thought to be increased by the way in which the same ads were frequently repeated:

> I'm not too keen on radio adverts actually. I think a lot of them try to be funny, but once you've heard them once, it's enough. [female graduate workers 21-24]

> Radio Forth [laughter]...There's one song and they have about five different adverts and they're repeated every single time...I don't like adverts on the radio, it's something I can't be bothered with. [female workers 18-20]

There was a sense of radio ads intruding into people's consciousness as well as into particular programmes. For example, someone had stopped listening to Radio Forth because "it used to be the same sort of jingles all the time":

> It's stuck in your head. It's a tune you probably hate but you're still singing them or whatever. [male workers 21-24]

Finally, outdoor advertising was generally very well received, although there was some concern about their environmental impact. Thus, while billboards at least "covered up empty construction spaces", there were some suggestions that they were "big" and "ugly". In general, informants thought that ads on billboards, buses and

bus-shelters tended to "catch your eye". While someone suggested that he would only notice such ads if he were struck in a traffic jam, others disagreed:

> You can get quite an impact with large billboards. You sort of stare at them on the bus.
> [male students 18-20]

- Up at the railway, at the bridge. You go across there and there's two of them. You always have to pass them and I always notice those two...
- And the ones at Bonnington Toll are at the lights, so if you stop at the lights you see those.

[unemployed females 21-24]

Indeed, there were some suggestions that they were potentially dangerous in distracting drivers:

- I think they're dangerous actually. Especially if you're driving a car and you see something that catches your eye: "See that thing?" Crunch!
- Off the side of a cliff! That's a good advert! [male workers 18-20]

Similarly, there were several references to the extension of the Tennent's Special "Blues Brothers" campaign to buses:

> They catch your eye. If you're sitting waiting on the bus and the bus passes, they're simple. I mean the white and black. [male workers 21-24, mixed]

Someone else complained that the lettering on those ads was too small to be read quickly, so that he was left wondering exactly what they were about.

Billboards were associated largely with cigarettes, and to a lesser extent, cars and alcohol. They were frequently described as "clever" or "cryptic", and even as "strange" or "confusing".

- Billboards, aye. The cryptic ones are always the best. You just sit there trying to work out..
- You don't want them too cryptic, because if you're sitting at the lights, the lights turn to green and you can't work it out. [male graduate workers 21-24]

Bus-shelter ads were also mentioned by various informants. For example, a female student remembered that when the Mars ice-cream bars were launched, the ads were "everywhere, they had them in bus-stops and that". The most frequent references to bus-shelter ads, however, concerned the industry campaigns promoting the medium. Many informants remembered the "Amy" ads, which featured a little girl informing people that her name was Amy and she liked slugs and snails. They also knew that it was "a marketing thing", involving surveys of public awareness. A male student remembered similar ads for "Sheila", which purported to be an Australian perfume, and there was some discussion about another ad which was running while the group discussions were being conducted. Its headline was "beauty is in the eye of the

beholder", and it featured a young woman with a tattoo on her arm. While someone was "waiting for the next installment", others thought it was more likely to be another "marketing thing".

1.5. Attitudes to ads for different products

Tylee (1989) reports that consumers tended to like ads for beer, lager, tea, coffee, and cars, and to dislike those for washing powder and financial services. He notes that among those aged 15-24, ads for banks were particularly unpopular.

A somewhat similar pattern emerged in this study. As we have seen, the young adults enjoyed or admired beer and lager ads. The Guinness campaign, the "London" ad for Tennent's, and the "Blues Brothers" ads for Tennent's Special were particularly well-received. All three were considered to be "well-produced", but each had its particular appeal. No-one accused the Guinness ads of insulting their intelligence, and informants were generally intrigued by the Rutger Hauer character. The story and music in the Tennent's "London" ad appealed to them greatly, as they could relate to the idea of a Scot renouncing life in London. Finally, the Tennent's Special ads were enjoyed for their humour and sense of fun, and their displays of the Blues Brothers' antics.

Jeans ads were also very popular, with their "glossy" look, attractive people, and "classic" soundtracks. Levi's dominated informants' experience of that category, as did Gold Blend in the tea/coffee sector, which was on the whole well-received. Informants particularly liked the "soap opera" format of the Gold Blend ads, and the suspense regarding the couple's on-off romance. However, other ads in this sector such as Nescafe's traditional ads and those for Scottish Blend, were despised for their "naff" approach and blatant appeals to patriotism respectively.

Other product categories which tended to have well-liked ads were confectionery and soft drinks. The appeal of the confectionery ads appears to be largely sensory: as we have seen, several people considered them to be among the most "effective", in that they admitted wanting or buying the product immediately after seeing it advertised:

> The ones that get me are the ones that show how they're made, you know. Like the Twix, the layers of shortbread...That's the ones that get to me. [female students 21-24]

There was an echo of this in some comments about soft drink ads. Thus,

> The juice and the Coke ones make you...It's always thirsty people in Coke, it's always hot in Coke adverts. They make you...if you're thirsty, Coke quenches your thirst sort of thing.
> [unemployed females 21-24]

In general, however, the Coke ads tended to be liked for the attractive people and lifestyles featured in them, or (as was also the case with Pepsi) because of favourable attitudes towards the rock stars endorsing the brand. However, these advertising approaches were not always considered favourably. Thus, there was some disapproval of celebrity endorsements, and even of the "perfect people" shown in the ads. Undoubtedly, much of the appeal of Irn-Bru ads lay in their sharply-observed parodies of these advertising styles.

Regardless of their smoking habits or attitudes towards tobacco consumption, informants tended to appreciate the creativity of cigarette ads. These were generally considered "clever" or "obscure", and to some extent an intellectual challenge, although this was decreasing as the campaigns became familiar. Given the young adults' irritation at "patronising" ads which "insult your intelligence", it is not surprising that they liked ads which seemed to respect them.

In contrast to the Campaign survey (Tylee 1989), there was relatively little discussion of car ads. Where they were mentioned, informants tended to talk about how they liked the music or even the cars, although many did not yet consider themselves in the market for cars themselves. Also in some contrast to the Campaign survey, the young adults' attitudes to ads for financial services were not particularly negative. While some bank ads were resented, the parodies contained in ads such as the Royal Bank of Scotland were greatly enjoyed. Similarly, the humour in ads for Scottish Amicable and Prudential* insurance companies was appreciated.

As we have also seen, informants were not slow to talk about "rubbish" ads which they "hated", or at best disliked. Most commonly discussed in this context were washing powder or washing-up liquid ads. When they talked about ads insulting their intelligence or stereotyping women, most people referred directly to washing powder ads. There were many references to the predictability of the situations shown in these ads, such as the "before and after" scenario, the "new, improved" claims, and the "brand X" trials. To make matters worse, the ads were also considered "overplayed". Two campaigns were considered to rise above these depths, however. The Persil washing-up liquid ads with Robbie Coltrane were thought to be "different" and amusing, and, as we have seen, some people interpreted the Radion ads as a parody of traditional washing powder ads.

Largely thanks to Dougie Donnelly's sterling efforts, ads for furniture tended to be derided. Those ads, and others for various furniture showrooms, were considered "cheap and nasty".

Some negative views concerning corporate identity ads were also expressed. As we have seen, several people were wary of ads "that aren't selling anything". In one group, there were differing interpretations of an ad which tried to counter accusations that the company was having a negative effect on the countryside by laying pipes:

- There's one, I can't think, it's an oil company who buried some pipeline through Wales. And it's beautiful countryside.
- Yeah.
- And it makes you think "oh well, maybe it's not so bad after all".
- They didn't show you all the effluent coming out into the river. [male workers 21-24, mixed]

There was also some scepticism and disapproval expressed in relation to Government advertising campaigns. Thus, a student talked about a Government poll tax ad which ran around the time of the local elections in 1987:

> They had to cut it because it was almost exactly the same as the Conservative election broadcast. It was the same concept, except this time the Government was paying for it.
> [male students 21-24]

Finally, informants' attitudes to ads for charities, feminine hygiene products and health and safety promotion were bound up with issues of taste, fear appeals and "shock tactics". These are discussed in the context of attitudes to advertising as an institution.

1.6. Attitude to the ad and the ad-brand relationship

As discussed in Chapter Two, the practitioner and academic literature refers to cognitive and affective elements of attitudes to ads. Many ads which the young adults chose to discuss took the form of dramas rather than lectures (Wells 1989), which may have obscured cognitive dimensions of their attitudes. Furthermore, the lecture-style ads which were mentioned tended to be along the lines of Dougie Donnelly's Sterling endorsement, and discussion generally involved ridiculing them as low forms of advertising life, consistent with Lannon's "the manufacturer speaks" category. This is not to say that cognitive responses to particular ads were absent: we have seen for example how informants were intellectually drawn by various ads, and how they distrusted various product claims. Furthermore, reflecting their advertising

literacy, brand attribute claims were often inferred from advertising imagery. Thus, in Wright's (1973) terms, the young adults provided many examples of cognitive responses, and these are examined later. As we have also seen, there were many expressions of liking or disliking in relation to particular ads. Strong emotions, such as anger, joy and fear were less commonly mentioned although they did surface on various occasions, as is also addressed elsewhere.

Reaction Profile research also tended to identify factors relating to information, warmth, entertainment and disliking. Certainly the entertainment and disliking factors were well represented in the young adults' discussion of ads. While there was some discussion of advertising claims and omissions, informants' attitudes to particular ads rarely seemed bound up with perceptions of their information content. Similarly, warmth emerged as a dimension of response to some ads, such as those using "cute" animated characters, but this was by no means a dominant theme.

Among academic researchers, there is some confusion between the antecedents of attitudes to ads and the attitudes themselves. MacKenzie and Lutz (1989) define consumers' attitudes to an ad simply in terms of liking, and propose five sets of factors influencing those attitudes: perceptions of the ad and of its credibility, attitudes to advertising and to the specific advertiser, and consumers' moods at the time of exposure to the ad. Bone and Ellen (1990, 1992) suggest that imagery may be another antecedent of attitudes to ads, and Lutz (1979) had earlier suggested that attitudes to ads may serve various functions for consumers, such as knowledge or social adjustment. Not surprisingly, informants' attitudes appear to be influenced by their perceptions of particular ads: for example, "studio ads" were derided, while "well-produced ads" tended to be respected. As we have seen, the credibility of various product claims was challenged, and this also seemed to have a bearing on informants' attitudes to particular ads. Undoubtedly, attitudes to advertising, incorporating perceptions of styles, trends and conventions, fed into attitudes to individual ads. So too on occasion did attitudes to advertisers: for example, the "naff" Radion or Fruit & Fibre ads were not taken at face value because informants thought the companies could have afforded better ads, and therefore must have intended the ads to look as they did for some reason. Mood at the time of exposure to ads was not discussed much, perhaps because informants had seen many of the ads on numerous occasions. Detailed recall and interpretations of complex advertising imagery, such as that associated with McEwan's or Guinness, seemed bound up with informants' attitudes to those ads, supporting the Bone and Ellen

contention that imagery processes are another antecedent factor. Finally, informants' attitudes to ads may be considered in terms of the attitude functions outlined by Lutz, and this issue is examined in a subsequent chapter.

Academic researchers since Mitchell and Olson (1981) have wondered whether attitudes to ads and brands are conceptually distinct. Indeed, several informants pointed out that it was not always easy to separate the two, as

> The adverts we like are the ones for the things that we're interested in...they're targeted for people who like adverts with music, popular music, stylish adverts and things.
> [male students 21-24]

Thus, on some occasions, there appeared to be a strong link between attitudes to ad and brand. Ads for jeans and beer were often discussed in these terms: as we have seen, both the products and the advertising approach were generally well-liked. Indeed, several informants talked about how they bought certain brands because they liked the ads. This was sometimes described as the ad having an "effect" on them, as in the case of confectionery ads. In other cases, they identified with the situations portrayed in ads. Thus, talking about the social disasters shown in Hamlet ads, it was suggested that

> It's the kind of thing that does happen and you just laugh. So that's why, say getting cigars or something, I might think of Hamlet and get a packet of them. [male graduate worker 21-24]

Other comments suggested a more deliberate and knowing response to ads, consistent with Biel's (1990) hypothesis about purchases being made to reward the advertiser. For example, describing the Guinness ads as "really funny", an informant remembered that

> I tried to start drinking Guinness after the adverts, but I didn't like it. [male student 18-20]

On other occasions, negative attitudes to particular ads seemed to translate immediately into negative evaluations of the brand. Thus, several people insisted that they could never bring themselves to visit the Sterling furniture warehouse or buy Radion, "because the advert is so crap". Extending Biel's hypothesis, these responses seem to be intended to punish the advertiser. Indeed, several informants referred to "offensive" or "disturbing" ads for Benetton as putting people off visiting the shops. Similarly, in the case of food or clothes,

> ...you get all these stupid adverts where they're all posing about and you just get fed up with them and you just think "No, I'm sorry, I'm not going to buy them". [male student 21-24]

In other cases, Mitchell and Olson's (1981) "advertisement attribute" theory seemed to explain decisions not to buy products, such as when ads offered negative user imagery. For example,

> [The Fruit & Fibre ad] would really put me off eating them, in case people thought I was like the people that ate them. [female students 18-20]

On some occasions, negative attitudes to ads were influenced at least in part by attitudes to the product or brand. Thus, several informants were bored by furniture ads, because they had no interest in buying furniture at this stage in their lives.

> Cos like we're not going to buy carpets or anything like that. So therefore we don't find any relevance in that at all...If we got older or if we have to buy furniture we'll start looking at those with a new eye... [female students 18-20]

A great deal of discussion, however, indicated inconsistent attitudes to ads and brands. For example, many informants who were not smokers, or who were "really quite against smoking", enjoyed the "cryptic" style of cigarette advertising and the humour of the Hamlet or Castella ads. Indeed, there were many examples of informants enjoying ads for products which held no interest for them, and discussing these in detail. For example,

> I like the Scottish Amicable advert cos it's funny. But it doesn't make me want to join the Scottish Amicable. I just go "Well done, Scottish Amicable, you made me laugh". [male student 18-20]

> I think if it's a good advert, even if you don't like the product, you'll probably enjoy the advert. [female students 18-20]

As a corollary, disliked ads did not necessarily lead to the brand being avoided.

> I hate the Readycash ones but they [the Clydesdale Bank] gave me good banking facilities, so I joined them. [male students 18-20]

> If you're buying something regularly or something you're not going to change just because the advert's poor. [male workers 18-20]

Such cases may be explained in terms of the relatively low salience of advertising, in that the satisfaction offered by the product or service was seen as easily outweighing poor or irritating ads.

Bearing in mind the dangers of generalising, and the interactions between products, target markets and advertising styles, there appears to be some support for Willis's (1990) view that young adults consume ads and brands independently. This is consistent with informants' perception of advertising as a distinct entity in its own

right. As one informant put it,

> It's not for the product, it's for the entertainment...The product doesn't really stick in your mind, but if you're telling it to friends, it's Castella, that's who does it. [male worker 18-20]

This comment suggests that the ad is perceived as a text in its own right, and that the informant's linking of the ad and brand reflects a desire to attribute the text to its author, rather than any concern with the brand itself.

2. ATTITUDES TO ADVERTISING AS AN INSTITUTION

As we have seen in Chapter Two, some of consumers' ambivalent attitudes to advertising has been explained in terms of their unease about its social and economic effects. Using the framework proposed by Aaker et al (1992), the concerns expressed by the young adults in this study are categorised in terms of the nature and content of advertising, its economic effects, and its effects on values and lifestyles. Following discussion of these issues, informants' perceptions of the advertising industry and its workers are examined, as are their attitudes to complaining about ads.

2.1. The nature and content of advertising

Under this heading, Aaker et al refer to issues of taste, ethics, and manipulation, and the special case of advertising to children. Reflecting their perceptions of children as particularly "gullible" and "susceptible" to ads, some informants suggested that children may imitate potentially dangerous behaviour, or even absorb sex-role stereotypes:

> The kids' adverts are really funny, cos they still give dolls to girls and tanks to boys. They still enforce that. [male workers 21-24, mixed]

Most concern, however, concerned the effect of children's advertising on parents. Toy ads were described as "blackmail" and "pure pressure stuff", making parents "feel quite bad and guilty" if they did not buy their children what they wanted. As a male worker put it, "I dread being a parent for that". There was particular sympathy for parents who could not afford expensive toys for their children:

> It's really sickening when you see these sort of computer game console things. I'm sure if I was nine or ten... You see them and think "Brilliant!". But at the bottom of the advert, you see "from only £79.95". How many families are really going to be able to afford that?
> [male students 21-24]

In many cases, costs were thought to mount up due to the range of accessories promoted with the toy. For example, a male worker talked indignantly about Barbie dolls:

> Have you seen the kit she's getting on the telly? Barbie's hairdressing salon, Barbie's bathroom, Barbie's this and that. And every wee lassie saying "Oh, I'm wanting that and I'm wanting this and I'm wanting that". Just going to be constantly at their mother and father to get these bits for this doll. [male workers 21-24, mixed]

Parents were also thought to be "blackmailed" into buying their children high fashion, high-priced trainers. Even requests for inexpensive products were thought likely to wear parents down:

> I think it must be rotten if you have kids and a new breakfast cereal came out. You're having to march these kids round the supermarket or whatever. It sounds like a nightmare...one of them's tugging on your sleeve cos they want a certain kind of cereal... [female students 21-24]

The ethics of advertising testimonials and emotional appeals were also questioned. In some cases, celebrity endorsements were thought to be dishonest, as the celebrities were thought not to use or like the product which they advertised. In other cases, advertisers like Coke and Pepsi were accused of a form of "blackmail", as

> ...they're asking people to buy the drink because their best pop star drinks that particular drink.
> [unemployed female 18-20]

As we have seen, many people had heard about the high fees which celebrities obtained for endorsing products. This was sometimes seen as "selling out", as in the case of Mick Jones allowing a Clash track to be used in a Levis ad. Similarly, a female student was disappointed that Tony Slattery had made an ad for McDonald's, as she thought he had been "into certain causes and everything". Another student was not sure what she thought of an ad appealing for blood donors which featured a Sean Connery voiceover:

> Whether he did it for free...then obviously that doesn't matter, but if they paid him a lot of money... [female students 18-20]

Products did not have to be endorsed by celebrities to be considered suspect, however:

- They get people off the streets to say "oh, it really works". They try to look convincing and they just aren't convincing at all.
- I think they just get a good back-hander once they've said aye, it works: "Here's a couple of hundred, shut your face". [unemployed females 18-20]

This last comment is quite disturbing, both in its language and implications. Once again, there is a sense of brutality associated with advertising, and also an air of corruption: the idea of an endorser being given a "back-hander" to "shut your face" does not square with accounts of testimonial advertising provided in advertising textbooks.

Some disapproval was also expressed of the way in which ads sought to manipulate by "playing on your emotions". Furthermore,

> Fear, terror and stuff as well. It's all based on the negative ideas rather than the positive ones. [male graduate workers 21-24]

Thus, a female student referred to ads "playing on people's fears to force them to buy insurance", and several people criticised ads for telephone lines such as Chatline for "playing on people through loneliness". There was also some disapproval of the Bisto ads with the little boy and his "single parent dad". As another female student observed, "you always feel sort of sorry for people who are vulnerable". Some thought the Bisto ads would upset divorced fathers, and that they should not link the brand with such matters:

> It's a load of crap. It won't make any difference if you're in that situation and use Bisto. [male student 18-20]

In general, it was suggested that ads were "quite mild" and that advertisers "are normally very careful not to offend people". There were some exceptions to this, such as the use of "shock tactics" in charity or "public information" ads:

> ...there was an advert that shocked me, was the one for the Protection of Cruelty to Animals or something. It was the one where they hung a donkey: "In some countries they kill donkeys or something, this is the way they kill them", and the picture of the donkey. I couldn't believe it. I was sitting eating my Sunday breakfast, I turned over the page, there was the donkey. I was going to complain about it, but I never did. [male workers 21-24, mixed]

Another informant talked about an anti-fur ad*, which showed blood spurting from a fur coat as a model walked down a catwalk:

> It's just like "oh no!". You don't want to see things like that on the telly, you want to see some guys in laundrettes with no trousers [laughter]. [female worker 21-24]

However, she and many others did not actually object to such ads, as "it's the sort of

thing you're going to remember". While the ads were often upsetting, it was thought that they had to be "horrific" to get their point across.

Another "shocking", "disturbing" and "horrible" ad was not accepted so readily, however. A Benetton poster (Figure 8.2) featuring a newborn baby still attached to an umbilical cord generated an unprecedented number of complaints (Advertising Standards Authority 1991) and much publicity as some of the individual interviews were being conducted, and thus became a talking point. Informants expressed very ambivalent attitudes to this ad. On the one hand, they thought that it depicted something "perfectly natural", "a normal thing", and something which was "human nature". Indeed,

> I suppose it has something to do with, like we're all the same at birth, we're all completely helpless and dependent on other people or something. [male graduate worker 21-24]

On the other hand, as the picture showed the baby "covered in all the muck and goo and whatever goes with it" and still attached to "what's the name of the tube, falutian, falutian something",

> Maybe if people are a bit sort of squeamish or something, they mightn't want to see this thing first thing in the morning. [unemployed male 18-20]

Ambivalence about the ad was heightened by doubts concerning whether the advertiser could "justify how it connected to Benetton". Thus,

> I thought it was stupid cos it's got nothing to do with Benetton. [female worker 21-24]

> I don't understand...unless they are bringing out a new range so that when the baby is completely born, they are bringing out new clothes... [male worker 18-20]

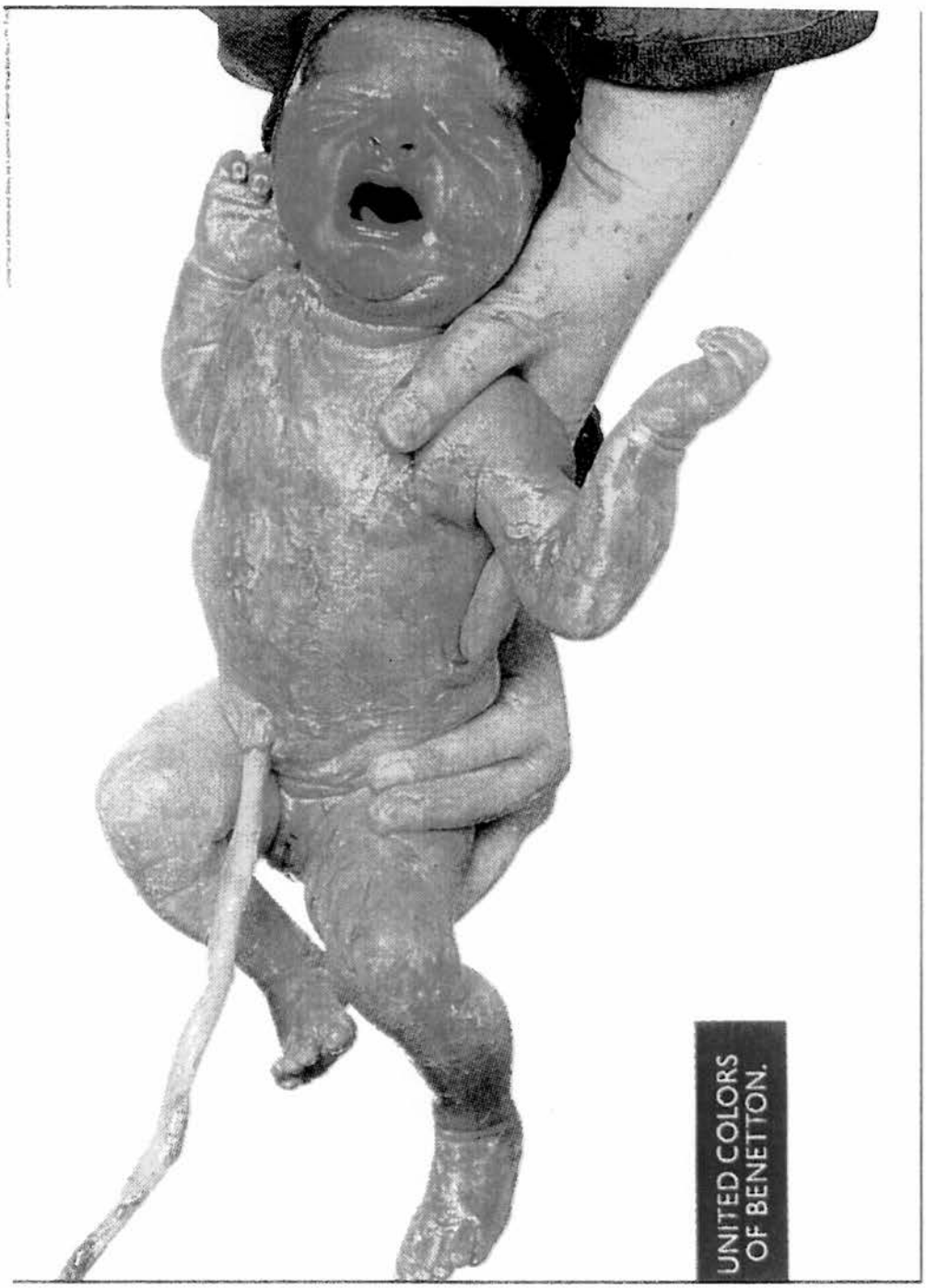


Figure 8.2. Benetton ad

Furthermore, the context in which the ad was presented was considered inappropriate:

> ...it was in Lothian Road and you couldnae miss it, and like it's about the size of a building. You know, the big poster, it was a really big one. I thought, ken "if you want to show pictures like that, you dinnae show them in a street", you know. There's a time and a place for things like that and I suppose that's what put a lot of people off. [female worker 21-24]

Issues of taste were also discussed in relation to ads for feminine hygiene products, as several female informants found these offensive. The problem seemed to be one of context rather than content. Thus, magazine ads for these products were not criticised, but several informants described their embarrassment at seeing the ads while they watched television with fathers, brothers or other family members.

> They really embarrass me so much when they come up. I don't think they should put that on television, I just don't think it's in good taste. [female students 18-20]

Finally, there was some discussion of sex and nudity in advertising. Informants recognised that other people may find such images generally offensive, but for them their acceptability seemed to revolve around their relevance to the advertised product, the target audience, and the "classiness" of the advertising execution. Thus, the black and white photographs of a naked couple used in ads for Obsession perfume were "artfully done", while "women taking their clothes off" in ads aimed at men were criticised, particularly when this was not relevant to the product.

> A lot of people think "What's the point of having a naked woman advertising bikes and cars?" [female workers 21-24]

2.2. The economic effects of advertising

As Aaker et al (1992) point out, there is much controversy over the economic effects of advertising. Some researchers argue that it provides product and informational utility, encourages new products, and reduces distribution costs. Others claim that it forms a barrier to entry and leads to market concentration, artificial product differentiation and higher prices.

Such matters did not seem to engage the young adults in this study greatly, although some of these debates were touched upon. For example, some informants seemed to think that advertising raised the price of products. Thus, an unemployed male informant suggested that cigarette companies should "stop advertising and just cut the prices down". Other informants discussed the "snob value" of Levi's in relation

to chain store jeans:

- It's definitely the label you buy, really.
- That's right.
- Paying for the advertising.
- Paying for the name. [male workers 21-24, mixed]

Asked whether they thought that was fair, the only response was a shrugged comment that "it's the way the world goes". A more hostile interpretation of advertising's effect on costs emerged from another discussion:

- A product is produced, and a product is consumed. And it's produced at a certain price, and it's consumed at a different price. And the price differential is paying people to do nothing.
- But profit's not a dirty word
- Profit to the producer is not a dirty word...the advertisers are taking money that doesn't belong to them... [male graduate workers 21-24]

There was also some discussion concerning the relationship between advertising and consumer choice. There appeared to be some acceptance of the idea that advertising facilitated choice. Indeed, informants seemed to expect this, which explains their unease at ads for monopoly products, where "you don't have any choice". Several people mentioned situations where advertising was particularly helpful in aiding choice. For example,

> You don't want to go in somewhere and buy some washing-up liquid and they have six there and you can't decide which one to pick. Even just an advert can help you choose, to decide, to pick something. [male students 18-20]

Another informant, while making no claims about ads aiding choice, thought that at least they did not take it away:

> The thing is, at the end of the day it's still your choice. You can buy it and not be happy with the product and think "Well , fine, I won't use it again". (female worker 21-24)

Once again, it was a male graduate worker who was most critical of advertising in this respect. He thought that while consumers should be able to choose between different types of products by being given "the statistics", in fact their choices were not informed:

> All marketing, it's all to do with controlling the information that you release, monopolising it and just telling people what you want them to know. At that level, advertising, marketing, it stinks. It's about keeping from the people what they need to make the choice. I mean this idea about the open market being great and it serves the consumer best, it's just rubbish. [male graduate workers 21-24]

2.3. The effects of advertising on values and lifestyles

Under this heading, Aaker et al (1992) refer to concerns about stereotypes, materialism, and the promotion of harmful products. The young adults in this study addressed these and related issues. They offered a detailed critique of stereotypes, and discussed materialism within a broader context of the values promoted in advertising. They discussed health and safety promotion campaigns as well as ads for potentially harmful products. Finally, they had some comments to make about advertising's influence on language.

2.3.1. Stereotyping

Overall, the young adults' concerns in this area addressed the kind of stereotypes which they had noticed in ads, and their potential consequences. Some thoughts were also offered regarding the reasons for advertisers' reliance on stereotypes.

In general, informants thought that ads over-represented some social groups and virtually excluded others. The people shown in ads were thought to be predominantly young, white, attractive, heterosexual, middle-class, and part of a "traditional" or "nuclear" family. Non-white people were thought to only feature in American ads (as "Americans tend to be quite conscious of that"), or where advertisers wanted to illustrate the exotic nature of products such as food. As one informant commented:

> There's a token black person occasionally. But you never see any Asians or anything like that. You never see any gay people...You never see any fat people, probably, or people's scars, you know. I mean it's pretty out of touch with real life. [unemployed female 21-24]

Furthermore, if other nationalities were shown, advertisers portrayed them in a patronising or stereotypical way. For example,

> ...if it is Chinese people, then they can't speak any English. It's a joke that they can't speak English. [male students 21-24]

Many people observed that the traditional configuration of "mother, father and 2.5 kids" dominated portrayals of the family, so that an ad featuring a different grouping, such as the Bisto one featuring "the single parent dad" became a talking point. This was thought to unrepresentative, as

> ...if you think of the amount of families that are above or below the 2.4 children or whatever it is now, I think there's probably more above and below that number than there are on the average line. [female students 21-24]

Another family stereotype was labelled "nicey-nicey" by a male student. Thus, an unemployed female informant described "the typical brilliant family...running around in circles trying to help each other". Similarly,

> They're all happy, happy families. There aren't any arguments in them. They're all smiles, big teeth. [male worker 18-20]

Turning to sex-role portrayals, many informants referred to male stereotypes in ads, such as those suggesting that men would be "brave and macho if you drive a certain car". If the macho male did not feature,

> ...then it's Rover cars, and the man and the baby's crying... [female students 21-24]

The most commonly discussed stereotypes, however, were those for women. More than two decades ago, Courtney and Lockeretz (1971) described female advertising representations as suggesting that a woman's place is in the home, and that women are dependent on men, decorative objects, and do not make important decisions or do important things. Similar themes were evident in the young adults' observations. While they recognised that "there are women in kitchens", there was much criticism of the way in which women were shown in the kitchen, cooking and cleaning for their families, and even following expert male advice:

> It's always a really keen and intelligent man with a lab coat and glasses. You know, kind of bossing this little stupid housewife around. [female graduate workers 21-24]

> I think if I was a woman I'd be really insulted [at the] woman in the background of the Radion ads slaving away. [male students 18-20]

Indeed, some students remembered seeing this issue addressed in an episode of "Brookside", in which a man and woman in an advertising agency were discussing ways of promoting a floor mop:

> ...the advertising strategy put by the other guy was priceless. That it was good for women to use this thing. I remember her saying "Isn't this discrimination?" [male students 21-24]

> She goes "No, it's sexist. It won't sell like this". [female students 21-24]

There was also some discussion of the way in which women were targeted for products such as washing powder, but often ignored for more expensive products such as cars, or even for beer.

> Well it's like the car adverts are always geared to men. Always. And all the household products, you know, it's always the woman doing the hoovering and the polishing... [female students 21-24]

You always tend to find it's the guys that you get the adverts with, not females you see sitting drinking a pint really. [unemployed females 18-20]

It was suggested that some progress had been made in this area, however, as advertisers were beginning to show women buying cars and drinking pints. There was also a feeling that gender role portrayals were changing for the better, with ads for products such as Teflon or Scottish Lamb showing men cooking, for example. Similarly,

... you've got that washing advert where there's the guy and it's the Persil one and he spills all the Persil on the kitchen floor. I mean at least you've got a guy doing washing.
[female graduate workers 21-24]

It could be argued, however, that it is hardly progressive to portray a man as incompetent in the kitchen. Indeed,

...it's quite sad that if you try and subvert these stereotypes that is enough to make the advert a joke. The man doing the washing up, this is funny and that's it, they don't take it any further.
[male students 21-24]

Informants were also quite sensitive to the portrayal of women as decorative objects. For example, a student "hated" a Levi's ad which showed

...a girl in a bikini walking along a beach...all you see is slow motion, is her putting on his jeans. You can't even see the jeans, all you see is like her body. [female students 18-20]

Others commented on an ad for Kenwood music systems as they flicked through magazines (Figure 8.3). The ad featured a woman lying beside a music system, accompanied by copy referring to sophistication. As a male student put it, "if I was a feminist I wouldn't be too chuffed about that". Similarly, the male graduate workers labelled the ad "sexist", as

...the picture doesn't tell you anything about the product. It's a woman, for Christ's sake. What's she got to do with a -
- She could be just enjoying the sound.
- She looks as if she's asleep...
- It's all so crap. Because she's so slim, why does she have to be sophisticated? She might be thick. [male graduate workers 21-24]

Figure 8.3. Kenwood ad

Underlining their advertising literacy, the group went on to discuss where the ad had been placed, agreeing that while it might have been acceptable in a women's magazine such as Cosmopolitan, it was much less so in a "general" magazine. It could be argued that some of this critique was offered for the benefit of a female researcher. Even if this were the case, it still indicates a sophisticated understanding of "decorative object" portrayals.

Informants were also sensitive to advertising's use of idealised images in the form of "perfect people", particularly when women were featured. As one informant put it,

> Where do you ever see them models? You never see them walking down the street! They always seem to be the perfect woman. You don't see them down at my work. They always seem to be about six foot tall, beautiful, perfect. [male workers 21-24, mixed]

Others talked about how the constant emphasis on the physical attractiveness of women strained credibility. For example, it was observed that the models in confectionery ads never even had spots. As one informant put it,

> I'd much rather there was this big fat pig sitting there stuffing a big box of chocolates down her throat and I'd think "Great!". [female students 21-24]

In general,

> What [ads] want to project is the ideal image. And the ideal image is slim, beautiful, tall, gorgeous, everything, tanned... [female student 18-20]

Indeed, the convention of perfection was thought to be so pervasive that it was even applied to ads purporting to portray "ordinary" life. Thus,

> Even when they try and make them look normal, they're not normal like me slobbing round, they're certainly not. [female students 21-24]

There were thought to be some exceptions to idealised portrayals. For example, several people liked some Tennent's ads, because "they really don't try to glamorise life in the same way":

> ...you know the one where you've got the two people. And like, they're having this amazing night in. They're just watching the TV with each other and the can of Tennent's, and you think "Wow, great!". And his brother turns up on the doorstep or whatever. And they look so scummy... [female students 21-24]

However, portrayals of "ordinary" people usually served to reinforce the convention of perfection. As a male student observed, ads rarely showed people who were not perfect unless they were trying to be funny. Similarly,

> They're taking it from one extreme to another. The good-looking girl is just the epitome of everything we want to be. Whereas the normal-looking person, who could be any one of us sort of thing, is made out to be really sick, part of a really tacky advert and "God, who wants to look like her?" sort of thing. [female students 18-20]

Stereotyped portrayals were thought to have several potential consequences. There were further indications of informants' wariness with respect to advertising here:

> People realise this is not what life is like. But it must go to your subconscious, you know. [female students 18-20]

> The trouble with these stereotypes, they are so ingrained, unless you make a conscious effort not to accept them, you do... [male students 21-24]

Thus, it was suggested that traditional "happy family" portrayals may "give you a bad impression of what life's meant to be like". For example,

> If a bairn is watching this he thinks "But this family's not like this, we must be different". It'll start them thinking that the way on the telly's the way it should be. And they're living a different life. Whereas it's the other way round. [unemployed females 18-20]

Similarly, it was suggested that advertising's constant portrayal of the "new man" may lead to unreasonable expectations, as he was more "myth" than fact. In terms of traditional sex-role portrayals, a student commented that he found these "depressing", because he did not expect to be in relationships "where the woman will do all the cooking and washing up". Another student thought that advertising stereotypes may

> ...be meant as harmlessly as possible and 99% of the population may take it harmlessly. But 1% of the population is a lot of people and I think in certain places there's enough tension whether it's sexual, racial, whatever... [male student 21-24]

It was the consequences of the physical perfection of women portrayed in advertising, however, which generated the most discussion. Several informants talked about their aspirational effects:

> And you sort of look at them and think "Well, maybe if I go and shop in River Island, I might end up looking like that". [female students 18-20]

However, images of perfection were more commonly described as diminishing women's self-confidence. This is in line with Richins's (1991) finding that women made comparisons between themselves and models in ads, resulting in lower self-esteem. Thus,

> They're very stereotyped, very glam. If you're not slim and elegant, then you don't fit. So if you're sitting at home a bit overweight they'll really depress you. [female workers 18-20]

It undermines people's confidence...there's an expectation for all women to be slim and no spots, flawless complexion and things like that. [unemployed female 18-20]

It was also suggested that such dissatisfaction may have behavioural effects. A male student had encountered "a lot of talk about especially women getting affected and anorexic". He recognised, however, as did many others, that such effects could not be isolated from those of the mass media more generally, as they also used idealised images.

Finally, underlining the young adults' advertising literacy, there was some discussion of possible reasons for the perpetuation of advertising stereotypes. In the first place, it was suggested that

- Adverts use the stereotypes cos they've got to...they're trying to make an impact as quickly as possible.
- Yeah, they've only got 15, 20 seconds to do it. [male students 21-24]

Secondly, it was suggested that advertisers would be "scared of losing their market" by breaking away from stereotypes. For example,

If you did show a gay person in a product it probably would lose a lot in sales and I think that's very sad, but I mean there's so many things that are wrong in society...
[unemployed female 21-24]

...the first of the advertisers deciding to take that step are playing a dangerous game. If one brand of jeans is showing ordinary people wearing jeans and one brand is showing Adonis-type people, your average punter would go for [Adonis jeans] every time probably.
[male students 21-24]

2.3.2. Advertising and the promotion of particular values

Several people referred to ads promoting values which they found particularly distasteful. For example, a student complained about the way in which soft drink ads had capitalised on events in Eastern Europe:

The ones with the coming down of the Berlin Wall, I found that insulting. Both Coke and Pepsi did it and they had shots of the Berlin Wall coming down, Ceaucescu getting overturned, and the sort of '89 revolutions. And then they had "Pepsi would like to congratulate Europe on getting its act together" sort of thing. [male students 21-24]

Another informant was incensed by a Government ad for the last Census*. It featured a little baby, supposedly asking questions about its future,

...and it makes out it's all innocent and really simple. Whereas at the same time, they're reproducing the race question that was handed out in the early Seventies. So that in 50 years time when we become incredibly fascist, we can hang you for being Asian...
[male graduate workers 21-24]

A Volkswagen ad* featuring a little girl being taken by the hand through threatening New York streets was also criticised:

I can't stand that. It's got this little rich girl getting into a car with her rich parents, all happy parents, with all these tramps going past. It's sick. It's like, all these things going on, all these horrible things like poverty and stuff that she sees. But then she gets into a car and drives off.
[female students 18-20]

While it does seem a little harsh to condemn a five-year old for a lack of sensitivity to social problems, these ads may be seen as quite blatant in their promotion of dubious values. Concern was more widely expressed about ads which were more subtle in reinforcing particular views of society. For example, as we have seen, informants discussed how advertising reinforced stereotypes through the incidence and nature of portrayals of various social groups. Indeed, it is the selective nature of its portrayals which greatly disturb some advertising critics. As Schudson (1984:233) points out,

Advertising picks up some of the things people hold dear and re-presents them to people as all of what they value...

There was also much discussion about the relationship between advertising and materialism. In the first place, the "yuppie lifestyle" was emphasised in many ads:

They're all portrayed like kids with fashionable clothing, smart cars. It's all pretty sort of rich.
[unemployed males 18-20]

Ads were also thought to encourage people to spend more money, and to buy things which they did not need. In this context, products were often thought to promise too much, being presented as the solution to all kinds of problems. As one informant put it,

...the world as portrayed in adverts is always, you know, "Well, your boyfriend might have dumped you, but you've still got your Nescafe"...even in an advert where something bad happens or whatever, there's always, you know, a silver lining. There's always hope because you've got these products... [female student 21-24]

Someone else complained that with financial services ads,

It's all sort of "if you take one of our accounts, you'll be able to afford a warehouse flat", a yuppie type thing. I think that's quite bad .[male students 21-24]

Furthermore, it was thought that the promotion of materialistic values might have some effect. As a female worker put it, advertising "makes you want". Similarly,

> It makes people want more, I think. Because like you don't necessarily need that product. People become quite sort of grasping, they want to have everything. [female students 18-20]

> Newspapers advertising videos, hifis, things like that. I think that makes people want to go out and buy the sort of latest product and whatever, that's maybe not really necessary. [male workers 21-24]

Such advertising-led "wanting" was in turn thought to have various consequences. It was thought that it could lead to disappointment, as people perhaps wished that their lifestyles were as sophisticated and expensive as those which they saw in many ads. Several informants talked about people getting into debt or financial difficulties by responding to ads inviting them to "dial now with your credit card". Similarly, in the case of car ads,

> I don't like the way they're always "0% finance". They're promoting these cars, letting you have them for no interest, but you still build up debt paying it off. They're leading you into spending a lot of money. [male worker 18-20]

Others talked about how ads may lead people to try to "keep up" with others in terms of possessions, and when that was not possible, perhaps becoming depressed, alienated, or jealous of others.

> ...it makes people wish and dream. It makes people depressed that they can't buy these images...it's sort of taking advantage of people in a lot of ways and encouraging them to spend money when they haven't got it...I think it depresses a lot of people. [unemployed female 21-24]

> ...rob houses cos you want the stuff. Crime because you need the money to buy all these things. Plus jealousy and battering people. Someone's got Levi's on... [unemployed males 18-20]

While this last comment may seem a little simplistic, someone else had seen a magazine article relating crime to advertising:

> There's a spate of videos being stolen when they're advertising videos. And there's a spate of crime in a specific area, and if the advertisement hadn't been shown in this area before, how the two were related. [female workers 21-24]

Others related advertising to "the sort of economy that we have" and to environmental issues. For example, a student implicated advertising in "the whole rat-race that isn't healthy", as its message was

> "Buy this so we can make more money so that we can produce more of it so that we can spread out, accumulate, buy and take over land", you know. And the investment spreads so far with these really big companies... [male student 18-20]

Indeed, he suggested that advertising contributed to such big companies being able to invest in areas which were "doing damage to the planet".

Similarly, it was suggested

> We're going to have to stop consuming in the way that we consume...otherwise there's going to be nothing left. We can't keep up like this. [male graduate workers 21-24]

2.3.3. Advertising, health and safety

Although many informants enjoyed cigarette and alcohol ads, they expressed some reservations about the ethics of such advertising. One frequently raised concern was the way in which these ads could contribute to under-age drinking or smoking:

> Cars they can advertise as much as they want. But fags and drink, I think they should be banned, because they kick up such a stink that under 16 year-olds are smoking and under 18 year-olds are drinking. To me part of the reason is because of the advertising that goes on for that. [unemployed females 18-20]

While the prevailing opinion seemed to be that advertising may unintentionally contribute to the problem of under-age consumption, several people suggested that more active recruitment may be undertaken:

> I wonder about the alcohol ones sometimes. They seem to be aimed at the very young. [male students 18-20]

Indeed, a female student referred to ads for Woodpecker cider which were " so obviously directed at people who were under the drinking age limit". Concern was also expressed about the effects of cigarette and tobacco ads among those legally entitled to consume the products. Advertising was thought to "glorify" or "glamorise" smoking, to "promote" drinking, and perhaps even to encourage alcoholism.

> I would say cigarette adverts should be banned completely. And even alcohol, how can you say cigarettes are worse than alcohol when you see all the alcohol-induced problems as well? [female students 21-24]

In the case of cigarette advertising, there were several references to double standards in operation. Thus, the Government health warning underneath cigarette ads was described as "hypocritical" and "a contradiction in terms", and others criticised the conflicting messages which they received about smoking:

...they moan about saying that they want everyone to stop smoking, nobody should smoke, it's bad for them. Then at the same time, you've got adverts...you see a great big bright massive billboard hitting you in the face...and then you get hit by your doctor, "Oh cut down, give up". But at the same time you've got the opposition saying "buy buy buy". [unemployed females 18-20]

The content of such ads was also criticised. As we have already seen, informants were quite cynical about the extent to which advertisers could "get around" restrictions limiting claims about the beneficial social impact of drinking. Several informants objected to the way in which tobacco companies associated themselves with health and fitness by sponsoring or advertising at sporting events:

I used to smoke. I don't think the advertising helps. You know, they advertise through sporting events. I know they're going to cut back on it but it should be banned.
[female graduate workers 21-24]

However, others doubted that the regulation of such ads was the answer to problems of alcohol or tobacco consumption. In the first place, many people pointed out that the influence of advertising could not be easily separated from that of peer pressure or more general mass media portrayals. Furthermore, it was suggested that regulation may actually be counterproductive. Thus, because of restrictions on ad content,

Most of the ones that are bad for your health you don't understand. You spend more time trying to work it out, so you're thinking about the product more [laughter].
[unemployed females 18-20]

Similarly,

People sort of say "ban smoking adverts"...but then again you could just make it more sort of trendy buying cigarettes if you weren't allowed to advertise it. [unemployed male 21-24]

Turning to issues of health and safety promotion, informants generally thought that such ads were "beneficial" and "might do some good". As we have seen, they also accepted that such ads might need to shock or use fear appeals in order to get their message across. In this context, several people were particularly impressed with ads featuring people who talked about how they became infected with the HIV virus*:

Made a mistake one night and he's HIV positive sort of thing. That really makes you stop and listen. That could happen to me, it could happen to anybody. [female workers 21-24]

As well as being "hard-hitting", several informants suggested that health and safety promotion ads had to be tailored to their audience. A male student suggested that some "public information films" were "hideously out of date", to the extent that children would consider them a joke. If anything, health education ads were thought to be too discreet and concerned with not offending older people. Another informant

(hopefully still with us) had no time for ads trying to prevent the spread of Aids by the use of condoms. He thought that these ads were unrealistic in their portrayal of young people's behaviour:

> And you get all these wee captions about, she's saying "will I ask him to stay?", and he says "I think I'll stay", and things like this, ken. "I wonder if he's got one, and he's wanting...". Naebody says that, ken. Just jump in and that's it. Then you go home. [male workers 21-24]

Someone else suggested that different approaches were needed for the general public and for those more at risk from Aids:

> One should be the informative thing, you can't get Aids from kissing, shaking hands. And secondly, the condoms, as in like the free ones, "This one's on us, make sure it's on you". Very much, get it through to that group. [male students 21-24]

Finally, there were some complaints about the timing of such ads. An unemployed male complained that the more explicit ads were only shown on late night television, "and what's the point of that?". Others complained that Aids ads tended to be shown at times when their age-group, which needed to be educated, was unlikely to be watching television. It was also suggested that the ads were not reaching younger people:

> The thing is with the Aids adverts, is that they put them on after nine o'clock and most kids are in their beds by then. So I think they should put them on earlier. They're quite horrific but they get through to people. [female workers 18-20]

1.3.4. Advertising and the corruption of language

As we have seen, informants recognised advertising's use of idealised images and overblown claims. There was some discussion of the way in which such claims used language, although this was not a major concern. As a male worker observed, Coke's "adds life" slogan was "one hell of a claim". Washing powder ads were thought to be particularly guilty of debasing language:

> It's progressive, and it goes from "brilliant" to "even more brilliant". Then it starts to get to the point where it doesn't matter. Brilliant should have been good enough.
> [male graduate workers 21-24]

Even language uses which some elevate to the status of metaphor in advertising (Dyer 1982; Stern 1990) did not impress everyone. Thus, someone complained about a fabric conditioner ad:

> He says "mine's smells soft". How can it smell soft? It smells nice and feels soft!
> [male workers 21-24]

There was also some cynicism about attempts to impress audiences with scientific jargon. For example, the group of male graduate workers spent some time trying to sort out the difference between "biological", "non-biological" and "biodegradeable" washing powders. Someone else slated "clinical" ads for products such as toothpaste and washing powder:

> I mean, it gets to be a bit ridiculous really. You know, this scientific process and shampoos where they talk about complex biological structures. I mean, who gives a monkey's, you know? You just want to wash your hair, you don't want triple DNA combinations. I mean, it just means absolutely nothing! [female graduate workers 21-24]

2.4. Attitudes to the advertising industry and its workers

The young adults' ambivalence towards advertising carried through to their perceptions of the industry, as they seemed to consider it attractive yet repellent and impressive yet over-rated. On the one hand, it was considered "one of the glamour occupations". Thus, those in advertising were variously described as "well-paid", making "lots of money", and "rolling in it". Others had images of high-flying, satisfying careers:

> I get the impression of a London executive type sitting in his office. Driving these high-powered company cars with the dark glasses on, the smart suit with the braces, red tie. He's hip, he's on the scene, that sort of stuff. Tuned in. [male students 18-20]

> I think I would like to work in advertising, cos I think it's good to create things, I think you can get a lot of pleasure out of it. [female worker 21-24]

Such impressions are quite similar to those held by the men and women in the study reported by Hall (1989). However, some informants sensed that advertising careers may not be quite so exciting. For example, a male graduate worker thought that related to the high profile of Saatchi and Saatchi's Conservative Party campaigns, advertising had for a number of years a "glitzy", "slick" and "snazzy" image. Now, however, he saw it as being "pretty mundane and routine". Similarly, a young unemployed female thought that it would all be quite boring, "because there's a lot of statistics involved". There were conflicting views about what it would be like to seek entry to or work in the advertising industry. Thus, while some thought that anyone with enough "personal hype" could get into advertising, others thought it would be very difficult to gain entry:

> It's really competitive though. There are so many people want to do it. It's difficult to get into, getting that first step in is really difficult. [unemployed males 18-20]

There were also different views about how demanding a career in advertising would be. On the one hand, it was considered a high-pressure environment, requiring people to be "absolutely brilliant at it, sort of inspired all the time", as "jobs are on the line for everyone".

> I think it could be quite hard, cos you might think one thing's really good and the other folk in your work might think it's rubbish. [female worker 21-24]

Specialist knowledge as well as creative skills were thought to be required. Thus, several people referred to advertisers needing degrees in psychology, or employing psychologists, so that they would know how to appeal to people. It was even suggested that

> You have to understand arts, buildings and angles and that sort of thing. And the way people would open the book and look at it, the first thing they would see and things like that. [unemployed male 18-20]

Not all informants in this study were convinced, however, that much specialist knowledge, talent or hard work was required. Indeed, on reflection, the informant quoted above decided that anyone could do the job,

> ...because the ones that study it, they go in too deep. It's like psychology. Once you understand psychology, you're frightened to do anything. You're conscious of every move you make. [unemployed male 18-20]

A male graduate worker suggested that while it was in their interests to create an aura about the industry, those working in advertising were "yuppie gits with a bit of suss". Someone else suggested that advertisers were failed comedians, as so many ads were bad. Others were equally dismissive:

> You wouldnae come home at night and say "I've had a hard day the day", ken. [male workers 21-24]

> Like all good consultants they sit and do nothing for three months of the year, scribble it on the back of an envelope and give a crap presentation and collect the money. [female graduate workers 21-24]

While there were some suggestions that people working in advertising "are basically like the rest of us, out to make a living". others had images of "long-haired people snorting cocaine all day". Indeed,

> I really don't want to meet one in a dark alleyway. Just the way their mind works. Especially some of them, when you see the adverts, you think "Who thought of that? They must be seriously gone in the head". [male students 18-20]

In other cases, informants' perceptions of those working in the industry reflected

their general wariness about advertising and its effects. Thus, another male student thought that agencies were not "very morally conscious". Those working in agencies were seen to be morally suspect in two ways. Firstly, reflecting the competitiveness of the industry, those working in it were described as "pushy" or even "ruthless":

> They're all supposed to be real - can I say "bastards" on the tape? [male worker 21-24]

> Well, there's a certain image of advertising...you've got to crawl and then stab, and then crawl and stab. [male student 21-24]

Secondly, industry workers were thought to be questionable in their dealings with consumers. Thus, an unemployed female informant thought that she had "too much of a conscience" to work in advertising, as she would not be able to "con" people if she did not personally believe in what she was selling. A female student wondered whether advertisers themselves really thought that it was fair to use stereotypes. Another student hoped that her sister, who was studying communications, would not go into advertising, as "it's not something I'd approve of...it's a bit like moneylending". Indeed,

> To go into advertising, I mean to actually want to make up adverts to sell things to people, I think you'd have to be a bit of a maggot. [female student 21-24]

2.5. Complaining behaviour with respect to advertising

The young adults' perceptions of the industry and its workers echo their wariness with respect to advertising and their concerns about its ethics and effects. Indicating the strength of their concerns, they sometimes used terms such as "sickening", "insulting", "offensive", "frightening", "infuriating", and even "evil" to describe particular ads or practices. However, informants were also quite vague about the bodies responsible for regulating ads, and unsure about the process or channels involved in making formal complaints.

This lack of awareness was coupled with a distinct disinclination to act. While several informants referred to people's "legal entitlement" to complain about ads which misled or offended them, informants generally expressed a marked reluctance to complain themselves, unless they were "really really angry". This may be the case if they saw a particularly racist, sexist or "pornographic" ad, one which "deeply insulted" them or was "awfully bad". However, thinking about complaining and actually doing it were seen as two different things, even among informants who expressed a great deal of disapproval:

I seriously considered complaining about it [a "racist" ad] but it didn't really bother me that much. [unemployed male 18-20]

I've often felt that I should complain but it's like everything else, you just don't do it. [unemployed female 21-24]

Complaints were thought most likely to be for reasons of practical self-interest, such as being "utterly mislead" about an important purchase.

I think I'd only complain about an advert on a big thing, you know, maybe like a washing machine or something like that. [female graduate workers 21-24]

In other cases, it was suggested, informants would just "grumble" to friends. There appeared to be several reasons for this antipathy towards complaining. Some of these were related to notions of consumer choice and freedom of speech. Thus, some people said that if they were misled by an ad, they would simply not buy the product again. Others argued that exposure to ads was within their control, so that

...if I see something on the telly I don't like, I've always got the power to turn it off. [male workers 21-24, mixed]

A female graduate worker, asked if she thought it was worth getting upset about an ad, dismissed the issue with a "Free country, you know", and another member of that group agreed:

I think they've got the right to advertise whatever they want. It's up to you to decide to follow it up or not and I can't say I get too excited about it. [female graduate workers 21-24]

A male worker's father had complained about television ads on several occasions, and some approval was expressed that a particular "sexist" ad was withdrawn following complaints. However, there was a general sense that

...people would think I was a lunatic if I complained about an advert. [female students 18-20]

Another informant suggested that if he were disturbed by an ad,

I would actually ask my friends to see what they thought about it probably...just to see if I'd been caught on the hop and was over-reacting. [male student 21-24]

Thus, in another female student group, much laughter accompanied a story about "some earnest person" who had complained that Endsleigh, an insurance company, might encourage people to commit suicide because of its new slogan, "End it". Others painted very vivid pictures of the kind of people who complained about ads. For example,

They've nothing better to do. They sit all ready to complain, sit and buy all the magazines to go through them page by page, go to the telly and say "I'll complain about that advert".

[female workers 21-24]

- I would just say, get out of your house more...
- You find it's probably mostly old folk because they're never over the door.
- Aye, nothing more to do apart from sort of go out to the Bingo or something...

[male workers 21-24]

These images contrast with the Advertising Standards Authority's (1992) finding that among the general public, 76% agreed that those making complaints are "perfectly normal people", and only 25% agreed that they are "people who want to be offended". The images may, however, reflect informants' desire to see themselves as immune to advertising. If they are to believe this of themselves, they need to be able to dismiss advertising as something of low salience in their lives, and a willingness to make formal complaints about ads would undermine this.

3. CONCLUSIONS

The attitudes to ads and advertising expressed by the young adults were complex, deeply ambivalent, and closely bound up with their advertising literacy. Three sets of contradictions were identified in their attitudes to ads. Firstly, they liked, enjoyed or even "loved" a lot of advertising. However, they found the constant repetition of ads tedious, and their understanding of advertising approaches and conventions made them discerning in their praise so that many ads were rejected as "boring", "predictable" or "insulting" their intelligence. Secondly, informants liked to consider themselves able to "see through" advertising, and immune to its persuasive power. However, understanding that the effects of ads are not necessarily obvious or immediate, they were also deeply wary of advertising. This wariness was expressed in cynicism about product claims, concerns about "subconscious" effects, and a general unwillingness to take ads at face value. Thirdly, informants treated advertising as a distinct entity with its own history and cultural identity. However, the boundaries between advertising and other forms of communication were very fluid for them, and their experience of each informed their reading of the other. This, together with the sense of constant repetition, seemed to contribute to a sense of advertising as pervasive and omnipresent.

While their experience of advertising seemed dominated by television, informants were very receptive to outdoor advertising, particularly on billboards. This again

may be related to their advertising literacy and desire not to be patronised, as poster ads often offer them some puzzle to solve. In terms of product categories, informants tended to talk most favourably about ads for jeans, alcohol, confectionery, soft drinks and cigarettes, and were most disparaging of ads for detergents and furniture. However, there was no clear link between their attitudes to ads and those for products or brands. As the practitioners suggested, informants expected good ads. In some cases they seemed to "reward" or "punish" advertisers through their purchasing behaviour. However, they frequently liked ads for products or brands which held no interest for them, and in other cases they were not bothered by poor ads if the brand were good enough. These permutations reinforce the complexity of informants' attitudes to ads, and their perceptions of advertising as a distinct entity. They also lend support to Willis's view of young adults as consuming ads and brands independently. Given informants' selective attention to advertising, it seems that their consumption of ads for unwanted products or brands must serve some other purposes, and these are explored in Chapter Ten.

Consistent with their sense of themselves as immune to advertising, informants presented it as something of low salience in their lives. They did however express concern about its potential social effects, such as the reinforcement of stereotypes and values, promotion of potentially harmful products, and appealing to children. Their ambivalence about advertising was reflected in their attitudes to those working in the industry, in that they were unsure about the extent of the glamour, hard work, and social responsibility involved.

These findings once again paint a picture of the young adults as active, sophisticated and discerning consumers of advertising. While many ads "sort of wash over" them, they were willing to engage with many others, bringing their experience of other ads and media forms to bear on their interpretations. Their wariness of advertising added an edge to this interpretive process, making them extra vigilant against being "taken in" by a reading which is too easy or too obvious. While this vigilance extended to the social effects of advertising, informants seemed unwilling to take their active response beyond expressing disapproval of particular advertising methods or messages: they saw little point in complaining to regulatory bodies about ads which they considered problematic, and they thought that people who did complain were over-reacting. Perhaps their sense of personal immunity and well-developed "schemer schema" ultimately worked against them, undermining their concerns about the social and cultural implications of advertising.

CHAPTER NINE

ADVERTISING INVOLVEMENT

The literature reviewed in Chapter Three suggests that ads as well as products or brand choice decisions may be the object of consumers' involvement. However, as we have seen, there is much confusion surrounding the involvement concept, and there has been little empirical research on consumers' involvement with ads themselves. This chapter examines the nature, objects, consequences and antecedents of young adults' advertising involvement, and considers the relationship between advertising and product or brand involvement.

1. THE NATURE OF ADVERTISING INVOLVEMENT

As we have seen, there is disagreement in the literature concerning the nature of involvement. It has been defined in terms of arousal, personal relevance and links with an individual's central value system. Involvement has variously been treated as a unitary construct, a multidimensional phenomenon, and a loose collective term.

The young adults in this study certainly seemed "involved" with particular ads. One indication of this was the strength of the vocabulary used at times. For example, they described some ads as "absolutely brilliant", "really effective", "amazing", "compulsive", or "powerful", and they used words such as "addicted", "intrigued", "transfixed" or "engrossed" to describe their response to others. Such expressions may simply suggest that informants had very favourable attitudes towards some ads, so that describing them as "involved" adds little to our understanding. However, many of the young adults' comments about ads can be related to definitions of involvement in terms of arousal, personal relevance, and links with an individual's central value system.

Informants often described how they would notice an interesting ad as they flicked through a magazine or sat through a commercial break on television. A sense of alertness and anticipation was evident in many comments:

> You just saw it and thought, "Hang on, what's this?" It's actually worth watching again. There's so much to notice in them. [male students 18-20]

> I might miss the first bit because I wouldn't be concentrating, and then I'd look out for it again. [female students 18-20]

Such comments indicate a degree of arousal in relation to particular ads. However, as discussed in Chapter Three, defining involvement in terms of arousal suggests that there is little which is distinctive about involvement. In this study, a sense of arousal appeared to accompany rather than characterise instances of involvement, which manifested itself as a relationship or connection between informants and ads. While this is in line with the understanding offered by the practitioners interviewed earlier, informants' involvement with ads went beyond the emotional or curiosity dimensions mentioned by the practitioners.

Five dimensions of involvement were identified in this study. Thus, in some cases, involvement was characterised by a sense of ads being relevant to informants' own experiences or connecting with their personal values. In other cases, involvement seemed to have cognitive, emotional or hedonic dimensions.

The first of these dimensions is consistent with Krugman's (1965) notion of "personal connections". Informants sometimes talked about how particular ads resonated with their own experiences. Thus, an unemployed male who had been to New York described how an ad for Murphy's stout set in a New York bar had "brought it all back to me". Another informant talked about how the Tennent's "London" ad related to her experience:

> That reminds me of the time I was in London. Like it's too big, ken. It's a big place, you just want to get back to Edinburgh to the wee pubs you know and everybody that you know in it, you know. I liked that advert. It was good. True to life I thought. [female worker 21-24]

Similarly, a group of male workers spent some time discussing ads aimed at preventing Aids and drug abuse. They described various ads in some detail, speculating about their target audiences. Someone argued that anti-drug ads were only relevant to people who did not yet take drugs. He added:

> I know what I'm talking about. I know people that have been on them and they dinnae pay attention to what anybody says...a few of them I know are six foot under so they never listened to nobody. [male workers 18-20]

In other cases, involvement with particular ads seemed to be based on a sense of shared values. In this context, several informants offered very long and detailed descriptions of the Tennent's "London" ad. For example,

It's sort of he's down in London and you see him walking through the busy streets, tube station and all that and you can see he's really pissed off with it all. And then he gets through in his office building, stands in the lift, looks about him and says "To hell with this!". Sort of walks away and the next minute you see him standing in Princes Street. And the music's quite good in the background, like a sort of song about Scotland and things like that. He comes into the bar, has his pint with his mates and then the next second you see is the bird, obviously his bird, on the tube in London opening up the letter with his photo. And she dinnae look too pleased about it. [male workers 18-20]

Ostensibly the straightforward telling of the ad's story, this long description seems to tell us as much about the informant himself. He identified with several values implicit in the ad. This story was told in a group which had expressed considerable nationalistic pride, so the idea of a Scot rejecting life in London met with his approval. He also seemed to relate to the idea that work might not be satisfying (hence the gusto accompanying the "to hell with this" in the lift at the start of another day): what really counted in life was being with your mates and having a pint with them. Girlfriends were not so important (hence the disparaging term "bird") and it did no harm to put them in their place.

Other comments also seemed to reflect involvement with ads at the level of underlying values. Thus, a female worker described in detail an ad for a low-alcohol drink in which a woman brushed off a man's unwelcome attention. Her endorsement of the ad seemed related to concerns that alcohol may make women more vulnerable in their relationships with men, who might take advantage of any drop in their guard:

She was obviously very sober and answered him very quickly, but they thought they were on to a good thing because all the girls were drinking. [female workers 21-24]

A cognitive form of involvement was suggested by various references to "trying to work out" what was going on in an ad, or to ads "occupying your concentration". Many examples were offered of advertising encounters where informants were asking themselves questions about what was happening in an ad or what product was being advertised:

It was a picture of people in a park laughing really loud...and you're thinking, you know, "What are they advertising?" And they start drinking, "Oh, it's some kind of drink". But it wasn't. [female students 18-20]

I passed it and I thought, "How's it out of the ordinary? I can't see anything". And I passed it today and I did actually slow down and then I realised why it was out of the ordinary. [unemployed females 21-24]

Turning to the hedonic dimension of involvement, informants often described ads as providing pleasurable, enjoyable experiences. This was sometimes the case with ads

for products which had a sensory appeal: as we have seen, for example, a student described the Galaxy Ripple ad as "chocolate put on film" and proceeded to give the rest of the group a vicarious eating experience. In other cases, people talked about the fun they had in consuming ads, such as the cinema ones for Gordon's Gin:

> Even at one showing, there's about three or four of them. And the whole audience likes them, cos when they come back on they're all like waiting for the punchline and laughing at them. [female students 18-20]

Emotional involvement was less common, reflecting the view expressed by Holbrook and Batra (1986) that ads tend to engender mild rather than strong emotions. Sometimes, informants simply identified with warm or peaceful moods in ads. For example,

> That's like a really beautiful advert. It's a very painless advert. You know how Nurofen is a pain killer, it's a painless kind of an advert. It's like a really soft and gentle advert. That's a really good advert. [unemployed female 18-20]

Instances of more intense emotional involvement were also cited, however. Leckenby and Stout (1985) refer to "depictive" and "participatory" feelings, and in this study informants seemed to recognise and share emotions portrayed in ads. Thus, another unemployed female informant talked about an ad for Fuji film which depicted the isolation of an Asian mother as she picked her children up from school. She described the ad as "heartbreaking", and thought that the advertiser was "really brave" to address such issues. Indeed, there was also a sense of personal relevance here, as this informant also talked about how her Asian friend had been "a victim of racial abuse". Most instances of stronger emotional involvement occurred in relation to "public information" ads, however. This is not surprising, as these were the ads associated with "hard-hitting" approaches. For example, a male worker talked about a drink-driving ad featuring a little girl crying*, commenting that "when you saw her cry, it's quite powerful". Another informant talked about an ad showing several empty hospital beds:

> It's an empty bed and Sean Connery says "So-and-so, aged such-and-such, car crash". But there's nobody in bed...you think these people have died for some reason. And then it shows you another bed and it says "Dismissed due to a blood transfusion". You're thinking that everyone's died but they've all been released. Cos it's quite a sad one. [female workers 21-24]

Similarly, a male worker described his reaction to a different ad appealing for blood donors. This ad showed the comedian Rowan Atkinson dressed as a doctor and literally trying to get blood from a stone:

> [It] sounds amusing, but it's not the way it's done. It actually strikes a chord...He's walking round it trying to talk this rock into giving blood and you see the pressure rising within him. He's actually getting quite aggravated...Then he goes down to it and says "please" or something like that. And then he gets so angry he hits it with the end of the stethoscope and he walks away...then he just turns round and there's this blood coming out of the stone, and "Oh, thank you". You know, he's really grateful that this rock is giving blood. It's brilliant. It's really good. I think that's probably the best advert I've seen really. [male worker 18-20]

There are many similarities between these five dimensions and those identified in research on product involvement. For example, Laurent and Kapferer's (1985) Involvement Profile referred to perceived importance, perceived risk, symbolic value and hedonic, emotional or pleasure value. Their perceived importance factor may be related to the personal experience dimension identified in this study. The absence of a perceived risk dimension here is not surprising, as we may expect risk to be associated with products or brand choices rather than ads themselves. A symbolic value dimension is also lacking in this treatment of advertising involvement. Again, this is not surprising: it could be argued that as ads are inherently symbolic, such values pervade advertising involvement rather than forming a distinct dimension. While Laurent and Kapferer combine emotional values with those relating to hedonism or pleasure, these emerged as distinct dimensions in this study. A distinct cognitive dimension was also identified here, presumably reflecting advertising's explicit communicative or informative function. This explicit communicative function may also explain the emergence of a personal values dimension in this study.

2. THE OBJECTS OF ADVERTISING INVOLVEMENT

As discussed in Chapter Three, involvement may take many objects, even in an advertising context. In this study, the object of involvement ranged from advertising as a whole through to particular elements of individual ads.

2.1. Ads and advertising

Consistent with their perception of advertising as an entity in its own right, informants sometimes expressed involvement with advertising (or "adverts") in general. Indeed, we have seen how a student regretted missing the National Film Theatre's screening of "the best adverts of all time". That he even contemplated going all the way down to London for this event suggests some involvement with

advertising. As another informant put it,

> I think folk are much more adjusted to thinking about adverts and getting into them, you know, than folk our age twenty years ago... [male graduate workers 21-24]

Groups of ads also appear to be potential objects of involvement. Thus, several campaigns were found to be involving, such as those for Guinness, Gold Blend, and Levi's. Other collections of ads also seemed to form objects of involvement, such as those by famous directors, "cryptic ads", and "serial adverts". In some cases, ads in particular media were considered involving. For example, someone mentioned that when she went to the cinema with certain friends,

> ...they always want to be in at the very beginning because they want to see all the adverts for some strange reason. [female students 18-20]

Making the effort to be at the cinema in time for the ads suggests some involvement at the level of "cinema adverts" as it would not be known exactly which ads would be shown. Similarly, in the case of television ads,

> People get bored watching the adverts, but I think they're great...If someone could give me a tape of just different adverts I would be sitting there completely infatuated, I'm completely intrigued by all these adverts. [female worker 18-20]

Individual ads also appeared to be objects of involvement.

> That's one of my favourites, actually. I could watch that for hours in fact.
> [unemployed male 21-24]

> Every time that comes on I just sit and watch it and everybody says "Are you around the bend or something?"...I'm just transfixed every time that's on the telly, I don't know why.
> [female workers 21-24]

2.2. Ad elements

Expressions of involvement most commonly occurred in relation to particular ad elements. The wide range of elements mentioned in this context emphasises the rich and idiosyncratic nature of the young adults' experience of advertising: even the smallest and most obscure details sometimes resonated with them. Indeed, a male worker complained that it could be "a bit infuriating" when advertisers used the "curtailed version" of an ad, as he did not like "missing the good bits".

In some cases, the advertising "message" element, as defined by Baker and Lutz (1987) for example, appeared to be the object of involvement. For example, a female graduate worker was particularly impressed by a car ad which "did actually give you

a big list of what it had". In general, however, informants tended to express involvement with an ad's characters or plot, the situation portrayed in it, or the music, humour or imagery employed. The "ideas" behind the ads, the "puzzles" which they offered, and the technical skill with which ads were executed, also appeared to serve as objects of advertising involvement.

Involvement with characters portrayed in ads was common. Several informants expressed considerable hedonic involvement with cartoon or puppet characters, describing their antics in detail and with great amusement. For example, a student talked about the "Hydro-Electric" (actually Heat Electric) ads at every opportunity. One of these featured two puppet parrots*:

> The two parrots, they just sit there on their perch and one of them really doesn't do much. The other one just sort of sits there and it goes "Well yes, you know, I come home, I like to have controllable heating, I like it to be nice and warm", and its wings are moving about. You've just got to see it, it cracks me up. [male students 18-20]

He had heard about the next ad in the series (a tortoise coming home after a jog), and was looking out for it. Several informants were similarly taken with the puppet characters in a Togs nappy ad*. For example,

> I'll tell you one I really love. It's brilliant this, this is a cracker...It's this wee puppet with a wee baby, it's about nappies or something. It's like The Muppets, Sesame Street, like that guy with the big nose...I think it's brilliant. [unemployed males 18-20]

Informants were also involved with human characters appearing in ads. In some cases involvement was with relatively superficial characteristics, such as the attractiveness of the men or women or the cuteness of the children who appeared in ads. In some cases, however, there was a deeper sense of emotional involvement with the characters. Thus, several informants talked about the little girl in the Volkswagen ad:

> She was so gorgeous. I mean I just love that advert. I could watch it and watch it and watch it... [female workers 18-20]

However, she and others in the group were involved with the child in ways which went beyond her attractiveness. Their account of the ad indicated their empathy with her, and an ability to see how threatening she might find the streets:

> And you see her, and you see all those towering buildings above her as well, and she's looking kind of round and the skyscrapers above her and that. And people arguing in the street as well. [female workers 18-20]

As we have seen earlier, many informants were attracted to the Rutger Hauer character in the Guinness ads. While some simply described him as "cool" or "mysterious", others tried hard to make sense of his personality and image in ways suggesting involvement on an emotional or intellectual level.

> [He's] not so much weird, but seems...how can I put it?...Like there was someone inside that he was wanting to, not let out, but he's not telling anybody, sort of quiet and mysterious person. That's the sort of impression I get. [unemployed females 18-20]

> He's very different. He's very good-looking I think and he's got striking sort of grey hair. His eyes are really sort of piercing. Very fine, quite a sculptured face I see. Also he's old which is even better. Slightly haggard. Been places, you know...He's really, really cool. He just knows where it's at. He's calm...you couldn't imagine him getting stressed out and making a fool of himself. [unemployed female 21-24]

Narrative elements of ads were also presented as involving in a cognitive sense, similar to the "curiosity" dimension discussed by the practitioners. The sequence of events taking place in various ads was frequently outlined in detail, and the "next episode" of "mini-series" was anticipated eagerly.

> The serial ones, the Nescafe ones. I hate them but they actually work, because you want to know what happens in the next one. [male students 21-24]

> It's a story and keeps going on, and you keep wondering what's going to come next. [unemployed females 21-24]

The actual situation portrayed in the ad sometimes appeared to be the object of involvement. In some cases this was because the situation was one which connected with their personal experience. The Tennent's "London" ad was frequently discussed in this context:

> I've got a lot of friends who went down to work in London. A lot of them are still there but a lot of them have either come back to Edinburgh or Glasgow or wherever, or want to come back, so it really appeals to me personally. [male students 21-24]

In other cases, the situation was found involving on an emotional level, as was the case with the blood donor ad showing the empty hospital beds. Fantasy situations were sometimes met with hedonic involvement, such as when informants talked about escaping to the desert island shown in the Bounty ads.

Involvement with music and humour in ads was frequently expressed in hedonic terms. For example, an unemployed female informant talked about how she "loved" a Crunchie ad because she loved the song featured in it. Similarly, a female worker remembered "just crying with laughter" at the Hamlet "World Cup" ad*. However, involvement with these elements sometimes took on a more cognitive element, as

indicated by references to "concentrating" to get the jokes in the Holsten Pils ads, for example, or even listening carefully to the lyrics accompanying the Irn-Bru ads:

> The song's brilliant if you listen to the actual words of it, it's really good.
> [male students 21-24]

The "ideas" in ads were often described in terms indicating involvement. This sometimes occurred when informants identified with the values implicit in an ad, as was the case with the Tennent's London ad. More commonly, however, ad ideas were considered involving in a cognitive sense, with many informants referring to "puzzles" or "mysteries". Thus, a student described how he liked "the ideas behind" various ads, while others admired "clever" ads which presented something in an unusual or off-beat way.

> The Red Stripe one, which is dead strange and I can't work out the message in it...it intrigued me, what I thought they were trying to do in it. [male students 21-24]

> I think a good advert's got a wee bit of mystery to start with, the instant you watch it you're thinking, what are they advertising? [unemployed females 21-24]

In some cases it appeared that it was an ad's imagery which was puzzling, or, as a male worker described it, "mental torture". For example, in one group someone mentioned that she did not understand a particular ad (Figure 9.1.). Someone else told her it was for Silk Cut, but she knew that already: she just could not make sense of the picture which was supposed to communicate the idea of silk being cut. Later on, someone in the group noticed this particular ad in a magazine, and together they worked out what was happening in the picture:

> - I couldn't understand why a can like that -
> - That's a man, is it not? Like the Tin Man.
> - He's blowing his nose! He's got his eyes shut, sneezing!
> - Having a sneeze, that's what it is!
> - A tin man blowing his nose.
> - I'm glad I understand that now. It was bothering me. [unemployed females 21-24]

Figure 9.1. Silk Cut ad

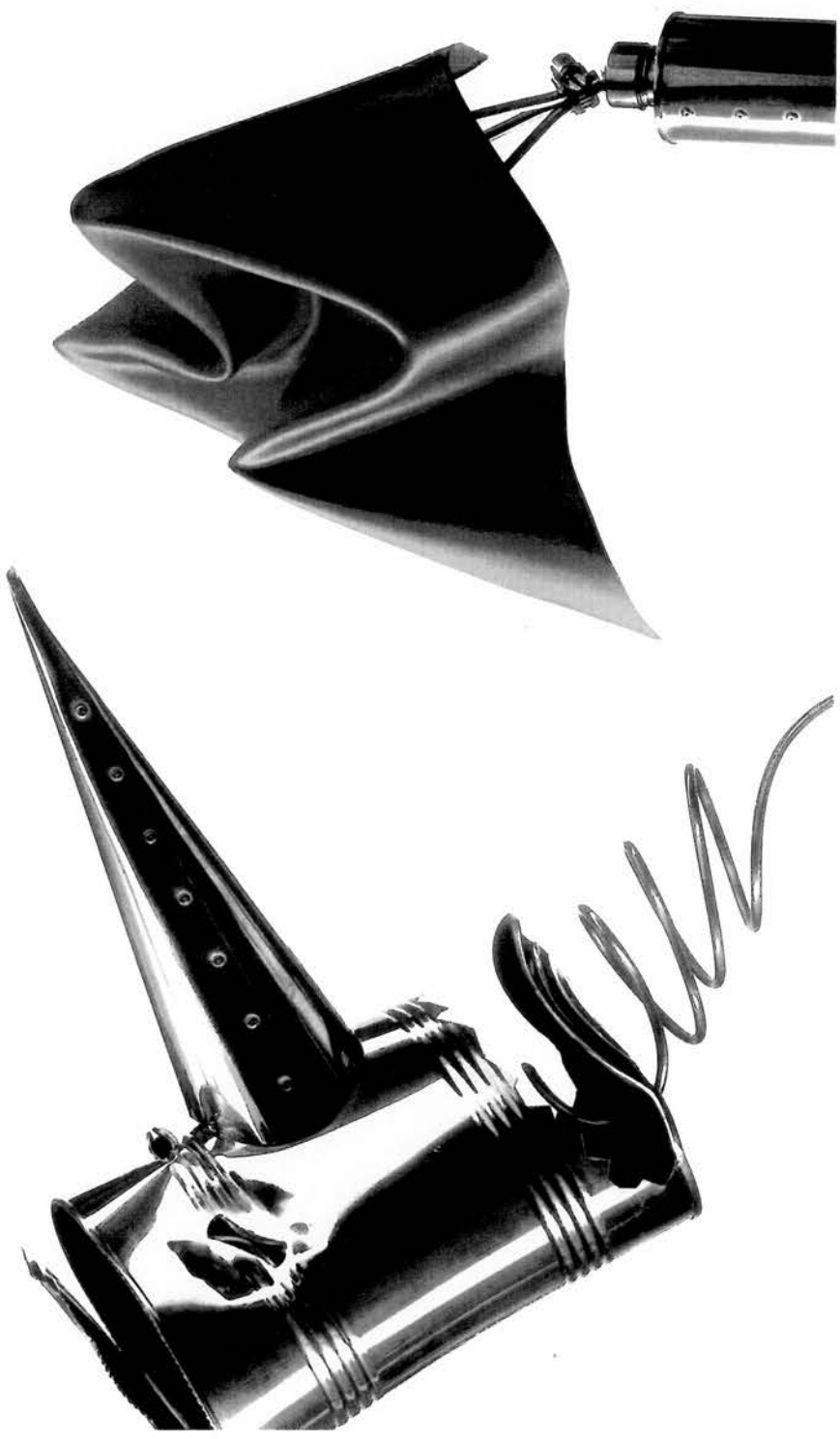
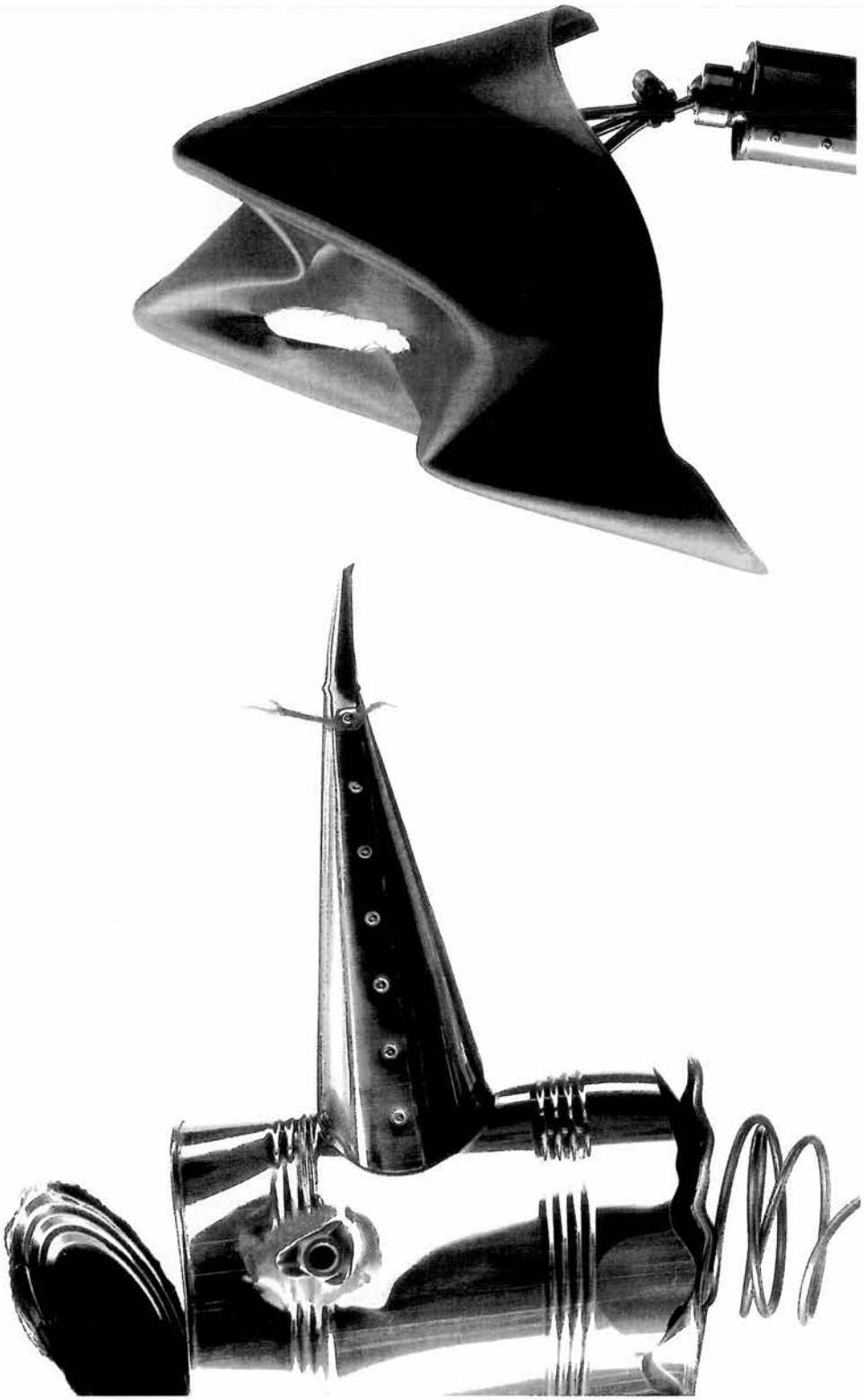


Figure 9.1. (Cont.)

LOW TAR As defined by H.M. Government Warning: SMOKING CAN CAUSE FATAL DISEASES Health Departments' Chief Medical Officers

Figure 9.1. (Cont.)



LOW TAR Accredited by H.M. Government Warning: SMOKING CAN CAUSE FATAL DISEASES Health Departments' Chief Medical Officers

In other cases, advertising imagery appeared to be involving at a hedonic or emotional level. Thus, the McEwan's "boulder" and "iceberg" ads were described respectively as

> Preindustrialisation and kind of, people walking about, you know, straight out of the poorhouse and they're all toiling away and pushing these massive kind of balls up this kind of ramp thing, just so a bell will toll, and you know, just the futility of it all...[female students 18-20]

> ...he's leaving work and sort of all the hassles, and the whole advert is like people swimming and couples together and, you know, peaceful waves and things. So once he saw this can of beer, he's at peace with himself and everybody else and he's left his troubles behind or whatever. [male student 21-24]

Finally, the production values in ads sometimes emerged as the object of informants' involvement. For example, we saw earlier how a female student was very taken by the "sampling" technique in the Ariston ad, and how a female worker wondered whether a character jumping across a construction high in the air was the product of trick photography. Another informant was very taken with the technical accomplishment of a Reebok trainer ad, which focused on "a line across the screen" and incorporated it in scenes of various sporting activities, as

> ...a net, and then someone else uses it as a hurdle, someone else uses it as a winning line. It's multiple sort of sports within this condensed area on the screen, and all the images coming in and going out. It's all very cleverly done... [unemployed female 21-24]

3. UNINVOLVEMENT AND NEGATIVE INVOLVEMENT

In addition to comments indicating that informants were involved with particular ads, there were some cases where they seemed uninvolved or even negatively involved.

On the whole, there was relatively little discussion in the groups of ads which informants found uninvolving. This is hardly surprising, as they would be less likely to remember or discuss such ads. In many cases, where comments indicated a lack of involvement with an ad or style of ad, these were presented as a point of comparison with ads which were liked or even disliked strongly. Instances of uninvolvement were described in terms indicating a lack of arousal, and a sense of indifference: as someone put it, "it doesn't really strike a chord to you". In some cases, this indifference seemed to be hedonically based, as when informants did not engage with the humour in an ad. In other cases, the relevance of an ad or ad element to informants' own lives was denied. For example, an informant compared the Andrex puppy ads with those for Kitikat cat food:

> I've got dogs at home so I'd watch those adverts more than Kitikat saying "eight out of ten preferred it"...I can't be bothered with any of that. Sort of, I'm happy for them.
>
> [male graduate worker 21-24]

Someone else could not relate to the Lucozade Sport ads featuring the footballer John Barnes:

> I'm not really as fit as John Barnes. It doesn't appeal to me. It's only all the real sportsmen drink that stuff, and I've not really got the physique to be a real sportsman![male students 18-20]

While uninvolvement appears related to a lack of arousal, negatively involved informants certainly appeared to be aroused, although they related to an ad in an antagonistic way. Extreme expressions of hostility were rare, but someone was moved to profanity at the thought of the Gold Blend ads:

> That bloody Gold Blend one, with the guy and the wifey. The minute that comes on I think oh for f---'s sake. If that comes on I turn it off to get away from it. [male workers 18-20]

In some cases, informants who found ads contradicted their personal experience seemed to be negatively involved rather than simply uninvolved. For example, a student talked about a Nationwide Anglia Building Society ad* which begins with a father writing a letter to his son, who is seen travelling in exotic parts of the world. The letter, read as a voiceover, says that the father knows his son will learn and grow from his experiences, and then return home. The Nationwide logo then appears, and

a voiceover states that Nationwide helps someone buy a home every four seconds. The student claimed that the ad "just didn't catch my attention", and that he was not "personally interested in listening" to it. However, he talked about the ad at some length, criticising its "terrible voiceover" and saying how he "didn't like the advert as a whole". His main objection, however, was to the son

> ...travelling around the world with this Indiana Jones type hat! It just didn't seem to have anything to do with how I would be and I know. I've recently been abroad, in Sri Lanka studying, and it was quite a wild place in certain places. I still wouldn't be dressing up like Indiana Jones. It just didn't seem to strike a note with how I would act in those situations.
>
> [male student 21-24]

In other cases, negative involvement appeared to be related to a conflict between the values implicit in an ad and those held dear by informants. Thus, a great deal of arousal was evident in a group of male graduate workers as they tore into the Nationwide Anglia ad. They considered the ad "pretentious" and "patronising", but above all, they resented the assumed inevitability of the son's return home and settling down. The ad was accused of "ideologically just battering you", in that

> Nationwide is saying, you know. "You will live your life in this direction...You can go out and do all these wonderful things around the world and you can help the Third World. And you can come back and buy your Barratt house in Barnton" [laughter]. The messages that tells you, the whole package that it's saying... [male graduate workers 21-24]

> I hate having it rammed down my throat and it's just like saying, "When you're young do what you want, but when you're ready to settle down, buy with us". It's really ridiculous.
>
> [male graduate workers 21-24]

Thus, the graduates seemed to resent the implication that although they might make a break for individuality and self-fulfilment, they were ultimately expected to conform. Indeed, someone compared the ad to a American Vietnam War song in which young men were told that they could do what they liked and have a good time in the meantime, "but by God, if your country says you're going to die for it, you die for it".

Informants also appeared to experience negative involvement along cognitive or emotional dimensions. For example, someone explained how a "silly" lingerie ad really annoyed her:

> ...it's just totally stupid. Honestly, I've thought about it and I've thought about it and I just can't get it at all. [female workers 18-20]

Again, this comment indicates arousal and a level of cognitive involvement. However, when she could not make sense of the ad to herself, her frustration appears

to have mainfested itself in a hostile reaction to the ad. On an emotional level, another informant expressed her concern about the drink-driving ad which had been described as powerful in another group.

> That was terrible...I just thought, you're going to upset a lot of people by showing it, people who have maybe killed children purely by accident, who weren't drinking and driving...That's going to bring it all back to you and I think that's a shame. You know, that's quite upsetting.
> [female workers 21-24]

4. INVOLVEMENT AND THE AD-BRAND RELATIONSHIP

The practitioners interviewed earlier suggested that consumers were more likely to be "pulled in" to an ad if they were involved with its product or brand. This is similar to the notion of advertising message or processing involvement discussed in Chapter Three, although the practitioners were less concerned with the overt brand attribute information emphasised in the academic literature. Thus, product involvement is presented as an antecedent of advertising involvement.

In this study, informants' prior involvement with an ad or ad element sometimes suggested a level of brand or product involvement. For example, several informants described how interested they became in stereo ads when they were looking for a new music system. As one informant put it,

> You sit and take notice a bit more if you use the product or if it's of any relevance to you.
> [male worker 21-24]

As a corollary, dislike or disinterest regarding products sometimes seemed to carry through to ads. Thus, an informant talked about how she "hated" the Oxo ads:

> I hate the husband and I hate the woman. I just don't like the children. I hate Oxo, I think that's the problem. I don't like Oxo so I hate the advert. [female students 21-24]

In many cases, it appeared that a lack of involvement with ads reflected the advertised product's lack of relevance to their own lives or experiences. Indeed, several people dismissed ads for furniture, carpets, or electrical goods on that basis. Similarly,

> BT [British Telecom] with their new campaign out at the moment, which seems sort of removed from me because I've never had any problems with a 'phone so that's one thing I switch off at. [male worker 21-24]

While these comments may present product involvement as an antecedent of

advertising involvement, the relationship between the two is much more complex than suggested by the literature on advertising message or processing involvement. Thus, informants who expressed some form of product involvement did not restrict their comments about ads to overt brand arguments. In part, this reflects the focus on advertising dramas rather than lectures (Wells 1989) in this study. Such ads could not be broken down easily into "central" and "peripheral" cues: brand attribute information was often inferred from advertising elements such as music or visual images. Furthermore, as several informants pointed out, products aimed at them tended to use advertising images, music and styles which appealed to them. Similarly, ads for products not aimed at young adults often used approaches which did not appeal to them, leading to a lack of hedonic, cognitive or emotional involvement with such ads or ad elements. Thus, ads tended to be consumed in a much more holistic manner than suggested in the involvement literature.

In other cases, brand involvement appeared to be a consequence rather than an antecedent of advertising involvement. Indeed, the practitioners had talked about how a "good enough commercial" may draw consumers into the ad and perhaps towards a brand which would not otherwise have been bought. While this suggests a level of passivity which is not supported here, on some occasions involvement with an ad did appear to have drawn informants into a relationship with a brand. Thus, the unemployed informant whose memories of New York were brought back to him by the Murphy's ad said that he went out and bought a pint of it the following night. Similarly, a female worker attributed her brand loyalty to Maxell tapes to an ad which she had seen years before, and still considered her "favourite". However, recalling the industry maxim that an ad can only persuade people once, someone who was intrigued by the Jeff Goldblum character in the Holsten Pils ads

> ...even went out and tried Holsten Pils, just to try it. And it was absolutely disgusting. I'll never do that again. I thought, "If Jeff Goldblum drinks it, I might as well try it".
>
> [female worker 18-20]

As was the case with informants' attitudes, their involvement with ads and brands often seemed completely independent. For example,

> I like the Kit-Kat adverts. No, not the Kit-Kat, the catfood adverts. I love cats, I'm a big softie for cats. [female students 18-20]

Informants frequently expressed involvement with ads or ad elements for brands or products which they would never consider buying. For example, those who expressed a great deal of involvement with the Togs nappy ad were not in the market

for the product. Similarly, an informant who had engaged with the imagery in the McEwan's "iceberg" ad distanced himself from the brand:

> I love the advert, it's a great advert, but no matter what they do I'll never buy the stuff.
> [male workers 21-24]

At times, the brand was even thought to intrude on or distract from the elements of an ad which informants found involving. Thus, in a Flake ad,

> A telephone's ringing constantly through it...I think that's quite annoying - "Answer it!" You do get frustrated waiting for her to pick up the 'phone. You want to know who's on the other end, waiting for her, and she's eating the Flake! [female workers 18-20]

Someone else was extremely impressed by the guitar-playing in the Coke ad featuring a character auditioning for a band. However,

> I dinnae like the end of it when it goes back to the ordinary Coke bit, "You can't beat the feeling". That sort of spoils it for me. All the good guitar playing at the beginning.
> [male workers 18-20]

Thus, it seems that the antecedents and consequences of advertising involvement cannot be simply explained in terms of brand choice or product involvement.

5. CONSEQUENCES OF INVOLVEMENT

The practitioners interviewed earlier identified a number of behaviours associated with advertising involvement, such as talking about ads to others or, in extreme cases, videotaping ads or sending fan mail to the actors involved. In this study, the consequences of informants' involvement with advertising, ads, or ad elements ranged from the visible and verbalised to the invisible and internal. Some consequences were quite mundane, while others were dramatic or even downright embarrassing. Some occurred during exposure to the ad, and others took place quite a while afterwards. Three general groups of consequences emerged, and these are discussed below.

5.1. Internal acts

As discussed in Chapter Three, some researchers have defined involvement in terms of the level of attentional capacity (Greenwald and Leavitt 1984) or cognitive effort (Baker and Lutz 1987) devoted to an ad. While these approaches define involvement

in terms of its consequences, MacInnis and Jaworski (1989) discussed the depth of processing as a potential consequence of consumers' "motivation" to process ads.

There are certainly similarities between these frameworks and the internal consequences of involvement indicated in this study, although higher levels were not necessarily integrated with brand information or attitudes. For example, the "hang on, what's this?" reaction which so many informants described fits well with the "preattention" level described by Greenwald and Leavitt. Indeed, informants frequently talked about how they or others picked up fine details in ads, perhaps corresponding to the MacInnis and Jaworski basic categorisation level. As one informant observed,

> I notice little things. My mum always says "how did you notice that?". Like I don't know, I just do. [unemployed females 21-24]

For example, informants commented that the Tennent's "London" ad did not show the journey back to Scotland, and that the baton shown in the first Irn-Bru ad did not return to the little girl who threw it. Indeed, someone was not convinced by the trajectory of the ball bounced in the Harp "mickey-take" of the Gold Blend ad:

> ...he bounces the ball, it goes out the window and the dog jumps out the window. The thing that gets me is, he's throwing the ball towards the window, it bounces off the unit. Therefore it should come back but it doesn't, it goes out the window. [male worker 18-20]

MacInnis and Jaworski describe brand inferences based on source credibility as heuristic and relatively superficial processing. However, this does not begin to reflect the degree of elaboration which informants employed for example in associating the Rutger Hauer character with Guinness, or even in rejecting Dougie Donnelly as an endorser for Sterling. As we have seen, in both cases informants integrated their knowledge and understanding of what these personalities represented beyond the world of advertising with their interpretation of the ads themselves. Such processes seem to relate more closely to the higher information integration level in the MacInnis and Jaworski framework, whereby message-relevant cues are integrated with other information to form inferential brand beliefs.

Turning to the next level of processing, there were many examples of role-taking, although when informants projected themselves into situations they did not necessarily integrate this with the brand. Thus, as we have seen, the male worker who described the Tennent's "London" ad in detail identified with the main character to the extent that he put words into his mouth ("to hell with this!"). We have also

seen how a group of female workers empathised with the little girl in the Volkswagen ad, understanding how threatening the streets of New York could seem to her. Indeed, the next ad which that group described was one for Red Stripe*. This featured quite similar street scenes, but here the main character was a young man. There was no sense of danger in their description of his walk through the streets, and they simply referred to "all this bustle behind him". There were some more explicit references to informants projecting themselves into ads or imagining the context of their stories. For example:

> I really like that photograph. You feel that you've been in that situation where it is getting dark. And the shadows... [female students 18-20]

> There's a wee boy doing his paper round in the morning. It's pouring rain and he goes "I want to be in bed"...you can imagine yourself out there and thinking "Oh, I don't want to be here!" [female workers 21-24]

Turning to the highest level in the MacInnis and Jaworski framework, the student who described the Galaxy ad as "chocolate put on film" seemed to undertake self-generated persuasion, although this process was not independent of the ad content as those authors suggest. The male students who elaborated on the imagery of the McEwan's "iceberg" ad seem to have processed it at the highest level. However, their personal experience of the brand brought them back down to earth:

> It's put over as being dead natural in the advert. Nature and birds. But it's the least natural drink you could possibly buy. It's just pure chemicals. [male students 18-20]

Informants who were negatively involved with ads also seemed to engage in self-generated persuasion on occasion. Certainly, the male graduate workers elaborated extensively on the Nationwide Anglia ad in ways which went well beyond its overt content. However, this was never going to bring them closer to the brand, as they associated it with values which they rejected.

Finally, related to high levels of elaboration, the many detailed descriptions and interpretations of ads provided by informants suggest that ads which they found involving were retained in long-term memory. Indeed, as we have seen, informants sometimes referred to ads from "years ago". Even allowing for some distortion of the time periods involved, they frequently referred to ads which had long been superseded, such as the Levi's "laundrette" ad or the McEwan's "boulders" one.

5.2. Individual acts

As we have seen, the young adults' advertising involvement sometimes led to brand trial, repurchase or loyalty. More commonly, informants referred to acts which did not relate to the brand, such as reading articles or watching television programmes about advertising. There were also many references to "watching out" for particular ads, and of physically stopping or sitting to look at them.

> You've got to sit and watch until the end till you know what they're selling. You can't sort of leave halfway through and say "Oh well". You actually sit there glued to the screen... [female workers 18-20]

> I mean, I really like the Robbie Coltrane advert. Like you know, "Oh, that's Robbie Coltrane, I'll stop making the tea", and I watch it... [unemployed female 21-24]

Among informants with access to VCRs, there were various references to stopping the process of fast-forwarding to catch ads which they liked. A female worker had taped the Togs nappy ad, and talked about how she would "sit and watch the video of it". She also referred to the bus shelter version of the ad:

> ...with the baby standing on its head and the puppet, which has "big news on the baby front". I always laugh at that. I have that right on my roof above my bed because I think that it's really cool. My mum went "Where did you get that from?" "I found it".

In fact, she later admitted that her sister's boyfriend misappropriated it from a bus-shelter for her. While this may seem to be taking advertising involvement to incredulous heights, this informant certainly knew the dimensions of the poster ("it's six foot by four foot"). Furthermore a report in The Independent on Sunday (Bennetto 1992:8) refers to a similar response to a Sony bus-shelter campaign:

> ...the posters had become collector's items. So far, about 3,000 posters have been stolen...Oliver Lewis-Barclay, account director of the advertising agency Bartle Bogle Hegarty said "We believe students are taking them for their bedroom walls - hopefully they have become a bit of a cult item".

Others described using VCR technology to learn the words of a jingle, or to work out exactly what was happening in an ad. Thus, some students discussed how an automatic vending machine hit someone in an Irn-Bru ad:

> - That bit at the end looks so sore when the guy goes to the machine [laughter]
> - The last time we seen it, it's classic, we just slow-motioned it down.
> - I've watched it on the video with the pause button. [male students 18-20]

On some occasions, informants were sometimes involved with ads which they had not yet seen, but had heard about. This resulted in particular vigilance. One

informant talked about an ad which been recommended to by someone else:

> The dog one as well, I sat up all night waiting for the dog. I was on my third night and it came on. It was only on about 12 at night. [female students 18-20]

Others talked about tuning in at a particular time to see the next installment of the Gold Blend campaign. Indeed, Allbeury (1994) claims that there was a 20% increase in the audience for an episode of "Brookside" following an announcement that the new Gold Blend campaign would be launched during it.

In contrast, informants who were negatively involved talked about changing channels or even turning off the television to avoid ads which they hated:

> That really nips my head. I've got to have the telly off when I see that.
> [female workers 18-20]

> I did find that quite - I don't know if offensive is the right word, but it's certainly the sort of thing that you'd change channels and watch the other ads for if there were any on.
> [male worker 21-24]

Another informant who appeared to suffer negative involvement with an ad, had his working practices affected in trying to avoid it:

> There's one you cannae miss about Aids, it's on the bus. The bus is bright pink. I used to work driving the buses, and when that bus came up, you sort of tried to avoid it, tried to get another bus. It caught the eye, the pink bus. [male workers 21-24]

His discomfort and embarrassment at the prospect of driving a pink monstrosity, complete with Aids slogan, was almost palpable.

5.3. Interpersonal acts

The consequences discussed above relate largely to individual thoughts and acts, although there was some mention of other people's participation, not least in terms of removing an ad from a bus-shelter. Other acts were intrinsically interpersonal. In some cases, involvement with an ad resulted in audience participation. For example, a student talked about how his flatmates would applaud when they saw a television ad featuring an attractive woman.

Talking to other people about ads emerged as one of the most common consequences of advertising involvement. Indeed, in every group and individual interview, informants referred to previous conversations about ads. Other people's views and observations were frequently brought into the discussion, often indicating

some involvement by these third parties:

> People at work have been talking about that a lot. They think that's great.
> [male workers 21-24, mixed]

> There's actually this woman appears in five different adverts. Cos my brother noticed her. She appears in the Galaxy adverts and adverts for Philips appliances and things like that.
> [female students 18-20]

> There's a wee girl I babysit for and she said to me one day, why do they always advertise cars, red cars? And I'd never noticed it before. [unemployed females 21-24]

While any aspect of any ad seemed a potential topic of conversation, informants generally thought that they were most likely to talk about ads which were funny, new, "different", or somehow controversial. Several people talked about how they had discussed the Tennent's "London" ad with friends. For example,

> - I actually 'phoned somebody in London to tell them about it, it was so good.
> - Yeah, I thought about sending it down to people, videoing it. [male students 21-24]

The Benetton baby ad also seemed to have generated a great deal of discussion. Thus, a female graduate worker had not actually seen the ad herself, but reported what her friends had thought of it. Another informant had been in a car with a friend and drove past the poster, and referred to an argument which they had had about it.

Ads which were part of a big campaign, or which featured attractive models were also likely to be talked about, as were "horrific", "brilliant" or "obscure" ads. Indeed, a male student had heard so much about how "brilliant" the Levi's ads were that he was thoroughly sick of them before he had even seen them. An unemployed female remembered being asked by an American woman on a bus to explain a poster which they passed, and several people talked about how "obscure" billboards would be a talking point if they were in a car with friends.

6. ANTECEDENTS OF INVOLVEMENT

The practitioners interviewed earlier believed that advertising involvement resulted from consumers' prior involvement with the featured product, or from an ad being good enough to "pull" people into it or "trigger" an emotional response. Within the academic literature, prior product or brand choice involvement was considered the most important antecedent of advertising involvement.

In this study, it seemed to be what informants brought to their encounters with ads, rather than the ads themselves, which led to their involvement. In some cases, this took the form of prior interest in the brand, but this was just one of many factors shaping involvement with ads. For example, a student who seemed involved with advertising as a whole, described a formative experience in an English class at school. She had been put in a group and asked to discuss a magazine ad:

> And I never thought about adverts until then. Like I got really interested. Like it was a trifle in a fridge. But it went on about this celestial delight. I mean how a trifle in a fridge can be a celestial delight. And it had this sort of golden glow to it. I got really into it - golden glow, celestial, sort of heavenly thing...and then after that...I do think about adverts quite a lot.
>
> [female students 18-20]

Thus, it was not the ad in itself which led to involvement, but the experience of being directed to examine it. This experience might reasonably be termed an antecedent of her involvement with advertising.

As discussed earlier, however, involvement may be experienced cognitively, emotionally, hedonically, or in relation to personal values or experiences. The antecedents of these dimensions seem to exist in peoples' own lives - their own values and experiences, their personal, product and media relationships, and their general likes and dislikes. Thus, many of the informants who were involved with the Tennent's ad had friends in exile, and they brought this experience with them to their viewing of that ad. In the case of the male graduates who were negatively involved with the values implicit in the Nationwide Anglia ad, the antecedents of their involvement may be explained in terms of their own values, experiences and expectations, which they brought to their viewing of the ad.

This is not to argue that involvement is automatic when an ad addresses any aspect of a person's life. That is far too simplistic and mechanistic a view: it is little more than a variation on the passive consumer concept, and would require informants to have been much less selective in their involvement than appeared to be the case.

This suggests that to understand the antecedents of young adults' advertising involvement, we need to consider two sets of factors. Factors such as personal values and experiences **facilitate** a relationship with advertising, ads or ad elements. Other factors **motivate** the relationship, however, and these refer to the purpose of that relationship.

7. CONCLUSIONS

This study contradicts Muhlbacher's (1986) view of "advertisement involvement" as a passive, visually dominated response to an ad which incorporates little information-processing. Here, advertising involvement appears to be a rich and multidimensional phenomenon, bound up with an active response to and relationship with ads. As they described a wide range of ads and their response to them, young adults indicated a great deal of involvement. Arousal appeared to accompany rather than characterise advertising involvement, which emerged as a relationship between informants and ads along one or more of five dimensions. These dimensions related to personal experience, personal values, cognitions, emotions, and hedonism.

The object of the young adults' advertising involvement ranged from advertising in general to particular elements of individual ads. It should not be surprising that advertising in general emerged as an object of involvement, as we have seen earlier that informants treated advertising as a distinct entity. Most discussion of involvement was at the level of ad elements, however. Here, the complexity and sophistication of young adults' response to ads was underlined, as informants appeared to find particular ad elements involving along a number of dimensions.

In some cases, the young adults expressed a lack of involvement, or even negative involvement in relation to ads or ad elements. These cases were accounted for within the framework outlined above. Thus, uninvolvement appeared to be accompanied by a lack of arousal, and occurred when informants did not relate to an ad on a cognitive, emotional or hedonic level, or in terms of their own experience. Negative involvement was expressed in conjunction with arousal, and tended to occur when informants' personal values were attacked, or when an ad antagonised them along the other dimensions.

A range of internal, individual and interpersonal consequences of advertising involvement were identified. Internal consequences related to the degree of message elaboration undertaken by informants. In contrast to the information-processing literature, high levels of elaboration were not necessarily directed towards overt brand information, or even integrated with brand attitudes. This is again consistent with the young adults' treatment of advertising as a distinct entity, and their often independent consumption of ads and brands. Turning to individual consequences of advertising involvement, these sometimes took the form of brand trial, purchase or

even loyalty. More common, however, were activities such as offering ads undivided attention, actively seeking them out, and using VCR technology to aid such activities. As a corollary, when informants were negatively involved with ads, they sought to avoid them. Interpersonal consequences of involvement centred on talking about ads to others.

The antecedents of advertising involvement appear to reside in individual informants rather than in ads themselves. To some extent, informants' prior brand attitudes or product involvement may serve as an antecedent of advertising involvement. In general, their personal experiences, likes, dislikes, and values are the factors which facilitate it. However, given the active and discriminating nature of their advertising encounters, an understanding of the factors motivating advertising involvement is also required. This issue is addressed in the next chapter, when advertising uses and gratifications are examined.

From a practitioner's point of view, it is presumably very gratifying that young adults can be so involved with ads and advertising. Furthermore, the extent to which informants reported conversations with other people about ads suggests that advertisers should carefully assess the potential role of word-of-mouth communications in their campaigns. However, the relationship between advertising involvement and product involvement or brand choice is by no means straightforward: product or brand involvement is only one of many possible antecedents of advertising involvement, and many consequences of advertising involvement did not relate to brand attitudes or behaviour at all. This suggests that there is much more driving the relationship between a consumer and an ad than is accounted for by the literature reviewed in Chapter Three. Once again, this raises questions about the purposes to which people put ads and advertising.

CHAPTER TEN

ADVERTISING USES AND GRATIFICATIONS

The distinction made by Millar and Tesser (1990) between consummatory and instrumental consumer behaviour may be applied to the advertising uses and gratifications identified in this study. Some of the young adults' uses may be seen as instrumental, in that they directly facilitated marketing transactions. Consistent with the frequently independent consumption of ads and brands, however, many other uses had little to do with marketing transactions, and related to consummatory aspects of consumer behaviour.

This chapter describes the range of young adults' marketing and non-marketing uses of advertising which emerged in this study. It compares these to the literature reviewed in Chapter Four, and assesses their implications for an understanding of young adult experiences of advertising.

1. MARKETING USES OF ADVERTISING

The young adults sometimes discussed their use of advertising for information about products, or suggested that it facilitated choice, convenience and competition. There were also some references to using it for reassurance or in relation to consumption-related aspirations.

1.1. Information

Informants sometimes talked about using ads as a source of information, primarily on availability and price. An example used by several people was looking for a new CD player, where they would look at ads to find out more about them and to see if there were any sales on. However, they were aware of the limitations of advertising in providing information:

> A lot of adverts...don't really tell you anything about the product, do they? It's just a story. I prefer the more informative adverts. [female graduate workers 21-24]

There seemed to be little expectation that advertising would tell consumers much about actual product features. Thus, a male student remarked in mild amazement that a particular ad "actually provides you with some information about the car". As we have seen, there was also a great deal of scepticism about product claims, such as washing powders being "phosphate free", or the "complex biological structures" of shampoos.

New product ads seemed to be of considerable interest to informants. While some questioned the need for established brands to advertise, they "could understand it if it was new products that were coming out". Even the generally despised washing powder ads could be tolerated "if it's something new". This interest in new product information may be explained in terms of the tedium associated with much advertising. In this sense, information about a new product may offer a diversion similar to a new advertising execution. However, informants' enthusiasm for new product ads seems to extend beyond this into the realm of surveillance. Asked if they would miss advertising if it were to disappear altogether, they consistently talked about losing out on new product information:

> You wouldn't like to miss out on anything like an amazing new breakfast cereal that they're making! [female graduate workers 21-24]

Overall, then, the young adults used advertising to some extent at least for information on the existence of new products, and the price and availability of more established (and usually expensive) products. In some cases, the information sought or obtained from advertising went beyond this, as when a drink-driving ad was described as "good informative advertising". Several unemployed informants expressed a desire for ads providing information on sports or training opportunities, or simply things to do outside the house.

1.2. Choice, competition and convenience

Informants suggested that advertising facilitated choice in two ways. Firstly, it provided people with more alternatives, as it was part of the competition between companies. Secondly, it told people about the alternatives available to them. Thus, without advertising, people would be "very much in the dark", and

> You wouldn't hear about any new products and there would be less competition. So you would have just the one product, not having a huge choice because you haven't really heard of things. [female students 18-20]

> I don't think the products that we have today would still be here if advertising wasn't here. I think we'd only have one type of washing up liquid, etcetera. Whereas they do in Russia just now, seemingly they only really have one product. [male worker 18-20]

In other cases the idea of choice was related to convenience. Without advertising, it was suggested, more time would have to be spent in the supermarket to decide on what to buy. Thus, a female graduate worker talked about how magazine ads saved her time trying to find out about cosmetics. As we have seen earlier, a male student was not happy at the prospect of seeing six bottles of washing-up liquid in a supermarket and not knowing which one to select; as he put it, "even just an advert can help you choose, to decide, to pick something".

1.3. Quality assurance and reassurance

As Crosier (1983) suggests, advertising can be used as an implied warranty, in that a company which advertises its brands is seen to stand behind them. Similar sentiments were expressed by the young adults. For example, an unemployed informant suggested that over time, people came to associate images of quality with frequently-advertised brands. Furthermore,

> ...they're so well known that if there was something wrong with the product then they'd do their best to protect their name. Whereas something that isn't so well known, that doesn't have any sort of advertising... [unemployed female 21-24]

Similarly, a student talked about his sense of unease after buying a music system which was not advertised, although he had sought expert advice. Even with less risky purchases, there was still some concern:

> If a brand stopped advertising you'd think "Where are the adverts? It must be going really downhill". [male students 18-20]

1.4. Added value

According to Willis (1990), it is during our teenage and early adult years that we are formed most self-consciously through symbolic and other activities. Advertising, which often deals in images of self-identity and social relationships, may be expected to have a role to play here. Thus, a student suggested that some of her male friends drank Guinness to be cool like Rutger Hauer. Indeed, a student suggested that

There's an image to create, to put a product in a situation that by having that product, you yourself...In the Guinness you're cool, it's a cool advert, in Gold Blend again it's sophistication. [male students 18-20]

There was also some discussion in a male working group about the merits of Levi's jeans compared to two retailer brands. It was suggested that Levi's, though advertising, had established a premium image so that

If you got 501s you were THE person. You bought 501s and that was it. [male workers 21-24, mixed]

When you go down to the pub on a Saturday night and everyone's buying Holsten, if you've got a pair of C & A's you feel, oh... [laughter] [male workers 21-24, mixed]

...They're quite homey, middle of the road, you put them on, that's it [Marks & Spencer's jeans]. Levi's, you've definitely got a trendy pair of jeans, quite smart, a bit special. [male workers 21-24, mixed]

1.5. Consumption stimulation and vicarious consumption

There was some recognition that advertising could be used to stimulate consumption, though not necessarily of the actual product being advertised. For example, a student thought that while she was not currently interested in furniture ads, when she was older she might look at those ads and think

"Oh, that looks nice, I might have something in that shade". [female students 18-20]

Others suggested that they might buy a white T-shirt, for example, from looking at the way the actors in a Coke ad were dressed. In this context, a report on the Gold Blend campaign (Allbeury 1994) discusses the reaction to a black cocktail dress featured in one of the most recent ads. The dress was only available in one British outlet, which usually stocked only two or three copies of such items. However, eight weeks after the dress featured in the ad, the shop had a waiting list of 200 names.

One informant mentioned that she liked buying Vogue and Tatler magazines, which were "just purely adverts".

I'm only interested in looking at the adverts for the clothes and the jewellery, and it's always like Van Cleef and Arpels jewellery and something like that. [female workers 21-24]

Crosier (1983) suggests that consumers may use advertising to gain vicarious access to experiences and lifestyles which would otherwise be beyond their means. As this informant also spent an hour "going around looking at everything" in the jewellery department at Harrods on a recent trip to London, she seems to be seeking out

vicarious consumption experiences. Such experiences may serve two purposes. They may be a form of escapism, if people do not expect to be able to afford them. Alternatively, they may be used as a form of consumer socialisation, fuelling and focusing aspirations. This informant seemed particularly ambitious and confident. Therefore, it is almost inconceivable that she could enjoy her vicarious consumption of the jewellery if she suspected that this was a substitute rather than a rehearsal for actual ownership.

Among unemployed informants, there was no evidence of advertising being used for vicarious consumption in either form. In fact, for the group which expressed the least hope for the future, ads for products beyond their means seemed almost unbearable, to the extent that one informant would pretend to herself that she had not seen the ads.

- Suites, carpets, curtains, that's the kind of adverts you get now, which I just don't pay any attention to because I don't have the money to buy them, so what's the point of listening to them?
- Ken, switch off while you're watching. [unemployed females 18-20]

2. NON-MARKETING USES OF ADVERTISING

In addition to using ads for purposes related to marketing transactions, informants seemed to obtain a host of other gratifications from advertising. There were many similarities between these and the classifications of general mass media uses and gratifications discussed in Chapter Four. In addition to structuring time, four major categories of advertising uses emerged: enjoyment, surveillance, self-affirmation or transformation, and social interaction. These uses are examined below.

2.1. Structuring time

Lull (1990) describes how television programmes may be used to structure or "punctuate" time. Television ads certainly seemed to be used in this way by many informants. Thus, commercial breaks were considered to offer, at the very least, an opportunity to leave the room to put the kettle on, go to the toilet or even make short telephone calls. Indeed, there is macro-level evidence for this particular use of advertising. For example, Whalan (in Nakra 1991:217) refers to the "flush factor": a drop in water pressure was found to coincide with breaks during television

blockbusters such as "Roots", "Jaws" or "The Godfather". While there were several complaints in this study about breaks which spoiled good films or football matches, others actually complained about watching films on non-commercial stations, because "you have to sit down and watch these films for hours on end".

2.2. Enjoyment

On some occasions, informants treated ads as a mild diversion or form of escapism. On other occasions, they derived a great deal of entertainment from ads, reworking them into their everyday lives as a creative resource.

2.2.1. Diversion, entertainment and escapism

Advertising in general was thought to offer some diversionary benefits, in that it made life "richer and more colourful". It "broke up the text" in magazines, and provided "a break when there's nothing on TV and you're just sort of sitting there". It offered something to look at in the street, "a nice break to monotonous buildings", or even "sudden splashes of colour":

> If you're walking down Leith Walk or something like that, you know. If there wasn't a banner there you'd be lost. Doom and gloom. [male worker 18-20]

Such benefits may be offered by advertising in general, but there were some indications that particular ads were used for diversionary purposes. Thus, one ad was described as "a break from your boring ads". This may even partly explain the attraction of some particularly "awful" low-budget television ads. As one informant observed, "most adverts are slick". Perhaps the "awful" ads, which were definitely not slick, were seen as offering some diversion from the professionally produced ones, which were the norm.

American copywriter Robert Fine (in Aaker et al 1992:389) maintains that "entertainment is sort of repayment" to the audience for allowing ads to interrupt editorial material and "push their way uninvited into somebody's mind". The young adults certainly seemed to welcome such payment. As we have seen, the entertainment value of television ads was frequently discussed in relation to the programmes. In a few cases, the relationship between the two was seen as economic:

> The only thing I would agree with television advertising is it pays for the television company...I'd rather have adverts on BBC rather than pay money to them for a TV licence. [male workers 21-24]

This view of television advertising as a "necessary evil" was not generally held. Many informants described advertising as source of entertainment in its own right, and in several cases it was suggested that the ads were "better" or "more interesting" than the programmes, and worth watching for "the enjoyment" or "a good laugh".

> There's an element of popular culture wrapped up in this. I mean people think it's fun, it interrupts your telly, it's quite amusing... [male graduate workers 21-24]

While television ads were mentioned most often in this context, some cinema ads were also singled out as entertaining. For example, a male student said that "I always have a little giggle to myself" when the Gordon's Gin ads came on.

There were some indications that informants also used ads as a source of fantasy or escapism. As an unemployed male commented, "you want something pretend, some fantasy". Similarly,

> They can perk you up as well. More the fantasy ones. Take your mind off things. [male worker 18-20]

For example, the sunshine on the desert island in the Bounty ad was described as "pure escapism". A student commented on one of the Levi's ads,

> You want someone to come driving through your office on a motorbike, get undressed under the table. Quite nice to think about. [female students 18-20]

Her daydreaming about this situation was particularly interesting as she was a first-year student. For her, it was almost a double fantasy as she had no experience of full-time employment, let alone a knight in shining armour to take her away from it. In general, however, there was relatively little explicit mention of using ads in this way. Perhaps advertising was used less as a source of heady fantasy, and more as form of mild escapism through its offerings of "wee stories" and entertainment, and the opportunities it provided for play.

2.2.2. Play

Willis (1990:1) argues that there exists "a vibrant symbolic life and symbolic creativity in everyday life, everyday activity and expression". Indeed, Grafton-Small and Linstead (1989) discuss the sophistication of "creative consumers" in their everyday understanding of ads, while Cook (1992) suggests that advertising may fulfill a need for language play.

The creativity and "vibrant symbolic life" of the young adults was certainly visible in their relations with advertising. Firstly, a great deal of playfulness was evident in the discussions themselves, particularly in the groups. Secondly, informants often talked about incidents beyond the research setting which indicated a playful or creative dimension to their everyday encounters with ads.

The young adults certainly played with advertising in the course of the discussions. They frequently acted out scenes from ads, trying on, discarding and making fun of various roles, characters, lines, and accents. Many characters were given walk-on parts, from Macbeth's witches, manipulative advertising executives and unloved traffic wardens, to celebrity endorsers, injured footballers, and tortoises waxing lyrical about controlled heating systems. For example, a student described the British Gas share issue campaign, putting on a one-man performance of the final ad:

> And eventually, I only saw it once, but this guy was climbing up this mountain.
> "Sid!" [panting]
> "Yes?"
> "You're too late Sid, they've gone!" [panting] [male students 18-20]

Jingles as well as dialogue were performed by informants. This was sometimes done in ridicule, as was the case when a female student sang the "tasty, tasty, very very tasty" jingle from the "tacky" Fruit & Fibre ads. In other cases, they were performed in tribute. For example,

> [Irn-Bru] say "It's not another one of those American ads for kids with giant shoulderpads. It's not a drink from those crazy Yanks, it's made right here and it's tougher than tanks. Made in Scotland from girders, unpronounceable too, it's call Barr's Irn-Bru".
> [male graduate workers 21-24]

> They had one for Alphabites: "A is for Alpha, B is for bites, C for yourself, they taste just right [laughter]. D is for dinner, E is for egg....A through to Z"...I never could catch the last bit.
> [female workers 21-24]

A sense of irony or playfulness was often evident in the treatment of advertising claims. For example, in the midst of quite a serious discussion of deception in advertising, a male worker commented that "probably Irn-Bru is no made from the girders either". Similarly, a male student referred to claims in catfood ads:

> Like Whiskas will go "eight out of ten cat owners prefer this", you know...but I don't know if the cat's bothered. [male student 18-20]

Turning to activities beyond the research setting, many informants described instances of audience participation in ads. For example, several people mentioned playing "the advert game" which involved guessing what product was being

advertised or how a particular ad would end. Thus,

> I remember when I was young we used to play this game, to see who could name the ad before it actually mentioned the product [laughter]. [unemployed males 18-20]

Another informant talked about an ad for Anchor butter featuring dancing cows, and added that

> ...all my friends know the words to that. It's just so embarrassing. You're sitting there watching TV or playing a game or something, and it comes on and everybody just turns round and starts singing it. [unemployed female 18-20]

There were many instances of ads forming the raw material for performances beyond actual viewing occasions. For example, a male student talked about how his friends went through a phase of imitating as a joke the Nescafe "hand action" of shaking the coffee beans. Lines from ads were also used as jokes. For example,

> One of my friends uses the [Tennent's Special] catchline all the time, the catchphrase and it makes me laugh. You're walking up the road, and he says "Is that no heavy? No, it's Special". [female students 18-20]

In some cases, advertising-inspired performances were more dramatic. For example, an unemployed male informant described how he tried to imitate the Impulse body-spray ad in which a stranger presents an attractive woman with flowers. Unfortunately, it did not quite come off, as all the real-life recipient could manage was "shock and staring and stuff. I felt a real wally". Someone else had witnessed a more successful performance:

> See that Babycham advert? I was up town one night and it was really really crowded at the bar and there was this really really really tall coloured guy. And he went "Hey! I'll have a Babycham". And the whole bar just went like that [puts on astonished look]. And it was so funny...he just went and did it. Everybody couldn't believe it. And he got served! [female workers 21-24]

Several informants talked about using ads as a symbolic resource in a very tangible way, in that they took images from magazine ads and recreated them as pictures or posters. Thus, an unemployed female informant had cut out some cosmetic ads and put them into clipframes, "cos some of them are beautiful". Similarly,

> When I was younger I just used to sort of create my own pictures with them. Or like trace them and just colour them. [female student 18-20]

> Mine was a wool advert...it was actually two halves in a magazine and this page had the woolly lamb, and this page was just like a grey page with a rainbow on it. So actually none of the advert was left in it. [female workers 21-24]

It was not just the female informants who used ads in this way. A male worker described a Budweiser ad which he had put up in his room. Another commented that Guinness ads generally made nice posters, and someone else (a trainee accountant) regretted that he had never managed to get hold of the Smirnoff ad with the headline announcing "I used to be an accountant until I discovered Smirnoff".

These activities suggest that informants used advertising as a creative outlet, or perhaps even as a form of escapism, through role-playing, joking, and generally creating their own fun from the raw material of advertising. Without advertising, someone suggested, "there'd be less things to take the mickey out of". Playfulness is described by Featherstone (1991) as an essential element of the postmodern condition: when certainty breaks down, and nothing can be absolutely mastered, irony and playfulness are useful lines of defence. The behaviour of these young adults may perhaps be explained in these terms.

2.3. Surveillance

McQuail et al (1972) defined "surveillance" needs in terms of information about things which might affect the audience or help them accomplish something. We have already seen how informants used ads as a source of product information. As one informant put it,

> ...you do need the adverts, you know, cos you want to know what's like on the market...
> [female worker 21-24]

While such surveillance relates to marketing uses of advertising, informants also talked about using ads to scan their environment more generally. For example, an informant described how he liked to look at car ads in magazines:

> They draw my attention as to how their technology is getting on...I like to make sure they've all got catalysers fitted as standard nowadays. [male worker 18-20]

Others talked about looking at the clothes or jewellery worn by actors in ads, and how they were interested in seeing what style of house or kind of room was featured. Thus, advertising was treated a source of information on "just up to date fashion sort of things".

Informants also seemed to scan ads for reflections of familiar, everyday aspects of their own lives. For example, a female student liked the British Telecom ads because they reminded her of what older members of her family were like. Other informants

were pleased when they recognised locations in ads. Thus, a female worker liked a car ad which featured scenery from a part of Scotland which she had recently visited, and the Tennent's "London" ad also appealed to many people because they recognised Princes Street and could even identify the Edinburgh pub which featured in it. Informants were also pleased when ads used sets which were similar to their own homes:

> There's one with a flat, and you look round the flat and it's just like any sort of flat round here. [female students 21-24]

This may be related to Krugman's (1965) "connections" between the content of a persuasive stimulus and the content of a viewer's own life. However, this does not explain what purpose such connections may serve. Perhaps seeing aspects of their own lives played back to them by advertising, which generally depicts a world of desirability, reassured informants that their lives were not so much less attractive than others.

Informants also seemed to scan ads to assess the attractiveness of actors. While this pattern would presumably vary according to people's sexual orientation, in this study informants tended to check out actors of the opposite sex in terms of their physical attraction. Thus, female informants described male actors as "quite cute", "quite smart", "nice lads", "the guys, the talent". Similarly, male informants commented on the women:

> That's quite a nice advert. I'd go out with her any time. [male graduate workers 21-24]

> I forget the name of the tights, I'm too busy looking at her. [male workers 18-20]

This may reflect informants' surveillance behaviour in their everyday lives, assessing the extent to which they find others physically appealing. Certainly these would seem to be ideal conditions for such behaviour, as the objects of attention are remote and there is no danger of having to interact with them. However, there were other consequences of such behaviour. It is hard not to feel for the student watching television with her boyfriend:

> And really, it makes you think "Oh no, what must I be like?". I mean you're sitting with your boyfriend and he's saying "Oh look at her, what a body!". [female students 18-20]

A limited educational role for advertising was recognised by some informants. One male working group insisted that the privatisation ads for the two Scottish Electricity companies were "putting across a lot of Scottish history". These ads certainly

featured historical characters such as Robert the Bruce, Bonnie Prince Charlie and Flora MacDonald, although the educational argument was undermined somewhat by the fact that her part was played by half a comedy duo, and in drag. However, what matter here are the uses to which informants put advertising, and at some level, those ads reminded that group of their Scottish history and heritage.

Other examples of educational uses for advertising were more intuitively convincing. It was suggested that bank and building society ads may teach people "how banks work" or the principles of interest. Ads were also credited with making people more aware of the environment, and of "what's happening in the world" more generally. Informants also recognised that some ads were purely educational, such as those warning of the dangers of Aids, drink-driving and so on. Indeed, a male student had cause to remember a public service ad from years before which advised children not to talk to strangers:

> I remember getting approached by some guy who wanted me to help look for a ring in the woods, and I just said "no way!" and shot up the road. And at the time it never would have occurred to me what he wanted to do to me, but I knew well enough not to go near him cos the adverts helped. [male students 21-24]

Others were more cynical in considering advertising's educational role. For example, a male graduate worker suggested that ads "pretend to educate the public about what's going to be best for them". Similarly, it was argued

> ...what it does do is adapt you to society...Like when you're young, you understand the whole gimmickery of the way commercialism works...It's not a nice thing to know but, well, it's good to know cos it gets you streetwise and it gets you used to all the trickeries that might get involved in life, you know. [male student 18-20]

Finally, reflecting informants' perception of advertising as a distinct entity, they did not only use it for information about their environment. They also treated advertising as part of that environment, and scanned it on that basis. As a male graduate worker observed,

> ...there's different things you can pay attention to in your life and advertising's just one of the things that you pay attention to. What's new in the cinema? What's advertising doing these days? [male graduate workers 21-24]

Thus, when informants talked about advertising with their friends, it was often to ask or be asked whether they had seen "the new ad" or "the latest one" in a campaign.

> It's just a case of "have you seen the latest such and such advert", and "keep an eye out for it". Or someone says that to you. [female students 18-20]

Another informant described how he was desperately trying to find a mobile poster ad for Edinburgh Zoo which featured a "horn" sticking up through the poster and the words "rhino in transit":

> Everybody says "Have you seen the rhino thing floating about the town?". And everybody must have seen it apart from me like. [male workers 18-20]

2.4. Self affirmation / transformation

Some advertising uses seemed to be bound up with informants' sense of self. In some cases, advertising provided them with aspirations or role models. In other cases, they seemed to use it to reinforce, work through, or express particular attitudes and values. Finally, advertising emerged as a potential tool for ego enhancement.

2.4.1. Aspirations and role models

While male informants sometimes related advertising to their self-image, they tended to discuss personal aspirations more in terms of acquisition - cars they would like to own, for example. However, they suspected that women used models in ads as role models. A male group was particularly taken with an ad for tights featuring Kim Basinger, but they doubted women would be as interested:

> - I dinnae think women would pay much attention to Kim Basinger though. Sort of, like we would.
> - Oh aye. Possibly, but they can see what she would like. She uses this sort of make-up and she does this with her hair and she uses this. [male workers 18-20]

They accepted "to some extent" that they may look at men in ads to see what they were using, although they were at pains to point out that they were not "always trying to look good and what have you". Female informants certainly seemed more open in discussing their use of actors in ads as role models. While the male admissions related mainly to looking or being "cool", female informants were particularly interested in the physical attractiveness of the women featured in ads, rather than their lifestyle or personality. Thus, they admired "gorgeous" models, who had "really nice hair" or were "beautifully dressed". For example, a female informant described how she would notice the models in magazine ads,

> ...if there's a girl that looks how I'd like to look. I'd like to look naturally beautiful and I look at what she's got on and think "Oh, that's pretty". [unemployed females 21-24]

This is consistent with Richins's (1991) findings that women compare themselves

with the idealised images in ads. She also found that such comparisons were related to their dissatisfaction with their own bodies. Indeed, a female student talked about how the models in the Levi's and Gold Blend ads "make you want to loose weight...you go away and you want to put make-up on".

This difference between male and female informants in the use of role models may be attributed to the "peacock effect" of having male informants talk in the presence of a female researcher. They may have been less willing to admit such behaviour to a woman. Alternatively, since they are relatively recent targets for the personal grooming and fashion industries, men may be simply less open in discussing such issues even among each other, or less conscious of their own behaviour in this respect.

2.4.2. Attitudes and values

Alwitt and Prabhaker (1992) refer to television advertising as serving a value affirmation function. Similarly, Buttle (1991) suggests that advertising is essentially raw material which we process and reprocess to make sense of our world. There were some indications of advertising being processed by the young adults in this way, as some ads seemed to be used to work through, reinforce or express attitudes and values. For example, we have seen how a student was troubled by his reaction to an ad for tights. He worried that he remembered the ad "for the wrong reasons", and he then tried to untangle, or perhaps rationalise, his response to it. He could not decide whether the ad was "sexual", "sensual" or "sexist". He thought it might be sensual rather than sexist as it was aimed at women, but he reckoned that it "hit all men on the sexual basis".

Returning to the male graduates' resentment of the Nationwide Anglia ad ("its ideologically just battering you") their rejection of the ad could be explained in terms of their age: as young people, they may not like to think that they could end up just like their elders. However, their status as graduates of a few years' standing may also be relevant. They were well-educated, they had work, and had probably made relatively few commitments at that stage in their lives. Thus, they could imagine their future as full of options and possibilities, of dreams worth chasing and risks worth taking. This may explain the indignation reported by one informant at his father for asking him what he was doing about a pension. It may also explain the hostility to the idea of their ambitions being cut down to a "Barratt house in

Barnton".

The reaction of these graduates to the ad is thrown into sharp relief by the response of another informant:

> The idea is that they sell more mortgages than anyone else. And it's just a face, a man's face. And he says "Son, please find enclosed these letters". And you see the son...he's obviously out travelling, finding himself. But the father's saying "We know that you'll come back and you'll settle here". It's a really good advert. [female workers 21-24]

This informant has also picked up on the values implicit in the ad, but she identified with the father. She seemed to see the son's travelling and "finding himself" as a temporary and almost incidental detour along the way to a "settled" life, as symbolised by a Nationwide mortgage. It could be argued that it was in her interests to accept the ad's "messages" in this way. While students are not the only ones who take time out to travel, they may receive more encouragement and opportunity to do so. She had not been to university, and had stayed in Scotland since leaving school. She may not like to think she had missed out on anything important, however, and so may find it reassuring to think that after his travels, the son will come home, "settle down" and aspire to the same things as other people. It is almost as if his going away and coming back justifies her never having left.

We have also seen how the Tennent's "London" ad appeared to reinforce a male worker's values about work, friends, women and Scotland. Indeed, a male graduate worker referred to the appeal of this ad in terms of its ability to "get the old dig into our friends down South". Similarly, a student liked an ad for the Alliance and Leicester Building Society because it reinforced some of his values:

> Maybe this is a very sort of middle class Scottish prejudice, but you could see sort of an idiot English person, sort of half yuppie or longing to be a yuppie. I mean you could see them trying to act that out and their struggling to make ends meet down in London. It struck a note. [male student 21-24]

One final comment suggests that the use of advertising to communicate values may be very subtle indeed. A female worker, a receptionist at an exclusive Edinburgh hotel, described a Lynx anti-fur ad which had appeared in magazines. This ad was in two halves. On the left-hand side was the heading "poor bitch", and underneath this was a picture of an animal caught in a trap. On the right hand side, under the heading "rich bitch", was a picture of woman wearing a fur coat.

This informant explained that she had seen the ad stuck up in the hotel's banqueting office. Given the status of this particular hotel, it can be assumed that many of its

customers are wealthy, which would make the phrase "rich bitch" extremely offensive. Furthermore, many of its guests may actually possess a fur coat, compounding the insult. Admittedly, the banqueting office is not the banqueting hall, so it is unlikely that many wealthy guests with favourable attitudes to fur coats would actually see the poster: presumably if the poster had been positioned in a place where it could give offence to guests, management would have insisted on its removal.

Therefore, the purpose of displaying this ad could not be to offend hotel guests directly. The simplest explanation may be that one of the staff in the banqueting office was particularly committed to the Lynx campaign. An alternative, and perhaps more satisfying explanation may be that it offers the hotel staff a discreet way of expressing resentment towards the guests, to whose faces they were required to be extremely polite and respectful at all times. Perhaps this ad allowed them to be subversive while going about their everyday duties of politely meeting the needs of the hotel's guests.

2.4.3. Ego enhancement

Informants generally liked to know who was advertising something, and what was going on in ads. This may be related to the use of advertising for surveillance purposes, but it also seemed bound up in their sense of self-worth. Indeed, as we have seen, informants considered understanding ads to be a very basic skill:

> I'd probably get pretty annoyed if I couldn't work it out. I'd think "God, I must be stupid".
> [unemployed female 21-24]

This may explain another informants' dismay at not being able to work out what was going on in an ad:

> The first time I saw the Benson & Hedges one I didn't understand what it was and I thought "God almighty, this is horrendous, I can't get this advert!". And I thought "Maybe if I put all these letters together I might work it out. Benson & Hedges, thank goodness for that!"
> [male student 18-20]

This is consistent with Crosier's (1983) discussion of ads offering "involvement" through puzzles to be worked out. It may also be explained in terms of Lull's (1990) suggestion that the mass media provides people with the opportunity to demonstrate their competence. Perhaps a clearer illustration of ads being used to demonstrate competence is provided by informants' enjoyment of ads which were generally

accepted as "bad", "awful", or "tacky". For example, local cinema advertising was described as "so corny it's great". As a male graduate worker put it, "being at the cinema is great - crappy adverts!". Some extremely low budget, "awful" television ads were also discussed with great relish. The very mention of these advertisers' name often met with laughter, groans, or both:

> I really love, it's so cheap, the Balmore Double Glazing. It's so bad...
> - I like the one for Martin's Plant Hire
> - Not, oh please no, oh no!
> - Oh it's awful!
> - It's quite a good advert. It's just so horrible, that's why I like it. [female students 18-20]

Another student had a soft spot for "dire" and "terrible" ads, and talked about the level of audience participation which they stimulated:

> They sing a song listing all the things you can hire from Martin's Plant Hire*, you see. When you're watching it you have to try and remember the words...Watching it with friends and that and every time it comes on you just have to sit and watch it...I mean you don't go out and make a cup of tea when Martin's Plant Hire ones are on. [female student 21-24]

> Balmore Double Glazing...They'd sing this ridiculous song and it was so terrible. The actors they got...you could believe they were employees cos they were just ridiculous...Yeah, they have a sort of cult following among myself and my friends... [female student 21-24]

Clearly these ads are recognised as "bad". While they may be treated as a diversion from the majority of ads which are "professionally produced", this hardly begins to account for the positive, almost perverse pleasure derived from the "badness" of these ads. If the "badness" of these ads is indeed the source of their appeal, this only seems possible because informants are sophisticated consumers of advertising: they recognise that these ads dramatically break the conventions of "good" advertising, and they relish that. This in turn allows them to congratulate themselves for their discernment (they recognise good and bad ads) and their independent spirit (they can choose to celebrate rather than denigrate bad ads). In what amounts to knowing subversiveness, informants seem to be like film buffs in their enjoyment of B movies: perhaps Balmore and Martin's Plant Hire are the advertising industry's equivalent of "Godzilla", and enjoyed by the consumer connoisseurs in that spirit. The knowingness and irony which such an attitude suggests may again be related to Featherstone's (1991) postmodern condition. In terms of uses and gratifications, however, enjoying the "B movie" ads may provide informants with a sense of their own taste, sophistication and even their subversion of "the system" of advertising.

Discussing such ads with others is presumably a means of projecting and reinforcing these positive self-images. There were other instances of informants using ads to

demonstrate competence to themselves and others. Thus, a male worker described the Guinness ad which used the Old Master paintings, and finished with Rutger Hauer saying "Get the picture?". This informant explained that that line was for the benefit of "people that dinnae realise what's going on". Similarly, a male graduate worker talked about how he understood the Guinness ads,

> ...but there's a couple of girls I know that just wouldn't twig to that at all. They'd sit there and go "What's that all about?" and you have to explain it to them. And even after you've explained it to them, they don't get it. [male graduate worker 21-24]

2.5. Social interaction

Lull (1990), Buttle (1991) and others have referred to the interpersonal uses and gratifications of the mass media. Certainly, informants talked about the way in which advertising featured in their dealings with other family members. It was occasionally a source of tension, as some female informants complained was the case with personal feminine hygiene ads:

> Everyone's embarrassed...your brother starts laughing or something. It's really stupid. Everyone just used to leave the room when they used to come on. [female students 18-20]

While in some cases it seemed that brothers used such ads for the specific purpose of teasing their sisters, some of the younger female informants indicated that these ads tended to cause discomfort all round. Given the age of these women (18-20) the ads may be unwelcome reminders to their families that their young daughters or sisters are actually adult, sexual beings.

While those ads seemed to divide the family along gender lines, others appeared to establish boundaries across generations. For example, if older family members did not "get" a particular ad, they were effectively excluded:

> Me and my brother were watching it and my mum came through and we were killing ourselves laughing and she went "Ha ha". She wasn't laughing, she wasn't as enthusiastic as we were. [female students 18-20]

On the other hand, ads could be used to remove generational boundaries by establishing some common ground. For example, a male student said he was always looking out for something in British Telecom ads which he could use to tease his mother, who worked for that company.

The interpersonal use of advertising extended well beyond informants' family circles. There were some indications of advertising being used for the purposes of male

solidarity or bonding. For example, there were many male references to and re-enactments of the Hamlet "World cup" ad, with particular emphasis on the point where a sensitive part of a footballer's anatomy was struck. Indeed, a male student explained that the ad had been the subject of much discussion in the pub, and that "the guys were wincing at that one!". The Hamlet ad was also a source of great amusement for female informants. They found the injured man's misfortunes quite entertaining, but the ad had other pay-offs for them as well:

> It was really good how they had that at the time of the World Cup. Cos you were sitting in the middle of this...and it just totally broke the ice. Cos you were sitting bored watching the football and you thought "Oh, that is really funny". And that did appeal to everybody.
> [female students 18-20]

As Lull (1990) and Anderson and Meyer (1988) have pointed out, the mass media facilitates communication in that it provides common ground, and an immediate agenda for talk. Indeed, a significant use of advertising appeared to be as a topic of conversation, at three levels. The first, most basic level was purely instrumental. Advertising, particularly on television, was an easy topic of conversation, almost a default option. Everyone was familiar with the same ads, and so they were easily drawn upon if things went quiet or there was nothing else to talk about. Indeed, it was suggested that this was like talking about the weather, but a bit more cheerful. Another informant compared advertising talk to conversations about soap operas:

> You know, "Did you see the state of Michelle in "Eastenders" last night?", or "Did you see the new Gold Blend advert?" [female workers 21-24]

While the role of advertising in these conversations appears to be instrumental, there were indications that it was also considered to be interesting subject matter, worthy of talk in its own right. The contrast between these two uses is highlighted in this exchange:

> - It's a handy number when you're sort of stuck for conversation and you've just met someone.
> - No, I tend to talk about adverts mostly with my friends.
> - It's actually part of the conversation, not just filling in gaps. [unemployed females 21-24]

Similarly, others pointed out that even though they might be watching television with friends, it was the ads which tended to generate comment and discussion. Thus, ads emerge as legitimate topics of conversation in their own right, not simply conversation facilitators.

At the third level was advertising as discourse: talking about advertising was presented as a distinct social skill, surrounded by conventions and expectations

regarding its practice. This may explain why the student felt stupid if he could not understand an ad, and his subsequent statement that "you've got to work it out in case it comes up in conversation". It also explains the seriousness with which some informants approached the question of "meaning" in ads:

> Some adverts, like, you've just no got a clue what they're on about. Maybe you say, ken...You're too embarrassed to say "I dinnae understand that", ken what I mean?
> [male workers 21-24]

> You probably go into work the next day and say "Did you see that advert for lager? What the hell is that supposed to mean? Is it supposed to advertise lager?" [male workers 21-24, mixed]

Willis (1990) describes advertising as a form of cultural capital for young people. The different ways in which informants reported using it in their conversations offers support for this view. At the first, instrumental level, we can think of advertising as small change which feeds the meter of interaction. By the time we reach the third level, however, we can think of advertising as large banknotes to be invested carefully for their dividends in terms of social status and self-esteem.

3. CONCLUSIONS

Perhaps the most striking issue arising from this chapter is the heavy weighting towards non-marketing uses and gratifications of advertising. In Millar and Tesser's (1990) terms, the uses discussed by the young adults were predominantly consummatory rather than instrumental. More non-marketing uses were identified, and they were more finely nuanced than those relating to marketing transactions. This is consistent with informants' perception of advertising as a distinct entity, and with their independent consumption of ads and brands in many cases. The range of uses to which the young adults appear to put advertising enhances our understanding of why they may allow themselves to become involved with it, and how their attitudes have come to be so rich and complex.

Five categories of non-marketing uses have been identified in this study. In addition to structuring time, the young adults used advertising for purposes relating to enjoyment, surveillance, self-identity and social relations. This categorisation has much in common with general mass media analyses of uses and gratifications. If advertising serves similar functions to the rest of the media, this suggests that it is well-integrated into the mass media and indeed the lives of its audience. This is

consistent with the notion of advertising as an intertextual entity, with leaky boundaries between it and other cultural forms.

The range and complexity of the young adults' advertising uses once again indicates that they are active, selective and sophisticated consumers of advertising. Furthermore, it seems that in their playfulness, subversiveness and self-consciousness knowingness, young adults are comfortable and confident players with what Davidson (1992) refers to as "advertising in postmodern times".

From a practitioner's perspective, as Lannon (1992) has pointed out, acceptance of an active, reward-seeking consumer requires a fundamental re-orientation of the entire advertising planning process. Thus, research techniques need to become more sensitive and creative. Ads themselves can afford to be more demanding of their audience, and the key challenge is to provide ostensibly non-marketing gratifications for consumers which nonetheless manage to link with the brand. Methods of evaluation will also need to be based on more complex and less mechanistic models of advertising effects.

Turning to wider implications, several issues arise. As discussed in Chapter Four, there have been calls for broader, more systematic and complex treatments of uses and gratifications, examining patterns of media use among different social groups, and relating these to interpretations of particular messages. These issues are addressed in the following chapters.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

DECODING ADS

Previous chapters have demonstrated the sophistication brought to bear by the young adults on their interpretations of ads. As we have seen, they did not only respond to ads in cognitive terms. Even their predominantly cognitive responses, however, were not well represented by the frameworks reviewed in Chapter Two. This is demonstrated by two critical comments, concerning ads for McEwan's lager and the 1991 Census respectively:

> It's put over as being dead natural in the advert. Nature and birds. But it's the least natural drink you could possibly buy. It's just pure chemicals. [male students 18-20]

> ...it makes it all innocent and really simple, whereas at the same time they're reproducing the race question...so that in 50 years time when we become incredibly fascist we can hang you for being Asian or partly Asian. It's really sick. [male graduate workers 21-24]

In terms of the cognitive response frameworks, it is not clear whether these comments should be classed as "counter arguments" or "execution derogations". They certainly refer to the tone and style of the ads, and express critical opinions. Thus, it could be argued that they are "execution derogations". In neither case does the ad make explicit statements about its object being "natural" or "innocent", yet such claims are inferred from the advertising imagery. Thus, the comments address the "idea of the product", suggesting that they could be classified as "counterarguments". However, classifying both comments as either "counterarguments" or "execution derogations" would obscure a fundamental difference between them. They both challenge the perceived advertising message, but at very different levels. The first comment simply disputes a particular inferred product claim, but the student does so from within the role intended by the advertiser: he addresses the ad as a potential (if unlikely) consumer of the brand. In the case of the Census ad, however, the graduate worker steps outside the role intended for him, and disputes the ad at an ideological level.

This chapter reviews informants' decodings of ads, and shows how these may be accounted for by a framework which expands traditional cognitive response categories and integrates these with Hall's (1973) dominant / negotiated /

oppositional categories.

1. DOMINANT READINGS

In many cases, informants' comments about ads indicated that, in Morley's (1974) terms, they shared the dominant code in which the ads had been transmitted. In other words, they did not challenge the ad's message, tone, or values, and they related to it as consumers of the ad or potential consumers of the brand. Such dominant readings of ads could generally be categorised as support arguments, endorsements of ad elements, or positive ad-related thoughts.

1.1. Support arguments

According to Wright (1973), support arguments are favourable statements concerning the idea or use of the product. These may reaffirm the accuracy or validity of arguments presented in the ad or make positive reference to a product's attributes. They may also refer to reasons for using the product, or undesirable consequences of not using it.

An example of the accuracy or validity of an ad's arguments being reaffirmed is provided by the male worker who had "taken the Pepsi challenge" and preferred Pepsi to Coke. He no longer thought that Pepsi had "fixed" the trials, and believed claims that in blind tastings, more people chose Pepsi over Coke. Reflecting informants' competence as consumers of advertising, however, many arguments which were reaffirmed had been inferred from visual imagery. For example, someone talked about a magazine ad for Lotus cars:

> It just looks very exciting. It looks safe as well, it's a substantial looking car.
> [male graduate workers 21-24]

Similarly, a group of male workers was very impressed by one of the earliest Aids awareness ads which featured an iceberg:

> It's the top of the iceberg, like Aids. And you just saw a wee bit of it and you know how icebergs go deeper, there's obviously much more and it makes you think. [male workers 18-20]

Another informant discussed a magazine ad which talked about eating disorders:

"Would you recognise an obsession if you saw it?", which is good because a lot of people don't realise they're anorexic, bulimic or have got an eating disorder...

[unemployed female 21-24]

In other cases, endorsement of ad arguments was not quite so explicit. For example, several informants noticed and discussed magazine ads for individually wrapped tampons (Figure 11.1). The ads were black and white, but the products were shown in bright colours and presented like fashion accessories. This was thought to suggest that they were

...things you can put in your bag and people automatically won't think "Oh, it's her time of the month". So they make it look bright, so they're trying to hide the fact of what they are at the same time being bright. You shouldn't feel embarrassed to carry them around or if they fall out of your bag or if you're buying them. [unemployed females 18-20]

- Probably shocking and also saying "Don't take it so seriously, there's nothing to be ashamed of".
- It's just like the girl's in black and white cos "Oh no, it's a terrible subject. And then the colour [female students 18-20]

While these comments do not explicitly endorse the claims being made in an ad, they do not challenge the advertiser's "definition of the situation", and thus are essentially dominant readings.

While this last example shows informants articulating a shared dominant reading of an ad, at other times there was some debate over appropriate interpretations. For example, two students discussed the L'Egoiste ad showing glamorous women shouting at an unseen individual:

- I don't understand it. What does it say? Is it for a man, and all the women hate him?
- Yeah, that's the idea. You know, he's a bastard, but he gets the girls! [male students 21-24]

Another group discussed the Scottish Amicable ads which showed things going wrong, as captured on home videos:

- I mean would you actually trust a company that uses that as a campaign if you were going to go out and buy insurance?
- I think the point is that even if you have accidents every day sort of thing, it doesn't matter as long as you're with them.
- Oh I missed that point entirely.
  So did I.
- I hadn't thought of it that way at all. [female students 21-24]

Figure 11.1. Simplicity ad

1.2. Endorsements of ad elements

Aaker et al (1992) refer to positive comments concerning an advertising execution's style, quality or spokesperson as "execution bolstering". Similarly, many of the comments made by young adults expressed approval or endorsement of particular ad elements such as music, humour or production techniques. Decodings in this category were not linked to the "idea of the product", as this would make them support arguments. Rather, endorsements of ad elements indicated independent consumption of the ad. For example,

> The Hula Hoops advert for the cartoon cat...it's really cute and I like its teeth. But I don't really buy Hula Hoops. The cat is really good. I like him. He's just a great little cartoon cat and my boyfriend likes him too so we sit and go "Yes, here's the cat".
>
> [unemployed female 21-24]

Many expressions of involvement with ad elements fell into this category. Thus, it is not surprising that endorsements were couched in emotional, hedonic and cognitive terms.

1.3. Positive ad-related thoughts

Olson et al (1982) do not offer any guidance or examples regarding thoughts which may be categorised in this way. In this study, several kinds of positive comment could not be categorised as support arguments or ad element endorsements. In some cases informants simply talked about liking particular ads, or mentioned that it had had an effect on them, without elaborating on the ads' arguments or elements:

> When that came out first I was really impressed because I thought that was a great advert.
>
> [male graduate workers 21-24]

In other cases, they made favourable comments about the originators of an ad, along the lines of

> To think up some of those you'd have to be quite imaginative or very observant.
>
> [male students 18-20]

Another type of comment related an ad or ad element to aspects of informants' own lives or experiences. For example:

> Although it doesn't relate to any of our lifestyles, it's an attractive style of life.
>
> [male workers 21-24, mixed]

> This hot chocolate ad. You think "I must buy hot chocolate and I'll end up looking like her".
>
> [female workers 21-24]

It may be argued that these two comments are simply endorsements of ad elements such as situations and characters. However, in considering them beyond the context of the ad and integrating them with their own lives, informants seem to be doing more than simply approving of ad elements. Indeed, many expressions of involvement in terms of personal experience or personal values could be classified as positive ad-related thoughts.

1.4. Other dominant readings

In that they do not challenge an ad's message, tone or values, curiosity or neutral statements may also be considered dominant readings. In this study, there were very few comments indicating curiosity about product characteristics, which is how Wright defined this category: curiosity was more commonly expressed in relation to the ad itself or to particular ad elements. There were also very few neutral statements, as informants were less likely to discuss ads to which they were indifferent. Where they did occur, neutral statements tended to be found in descriptions of ads or comparisons between them, or in explanations of the codes used to make sense of particular ads. For example,

> When you look at the adverts, they're trying to advertise cigarettes, but there's no a picture of a cigarette up there...it's a piece of silk and they're trying to cut up the middle of it or something: Silk Cut. [female worker 21-24]

However, even comments such as these were more likely than not to incorporate a positive or negative evaluation. For example, many informants who explained the conventions of cigarette ads also mentioned that these ads were becoming too predictable.

2. NEGOTIATED READINGS

In Morley's terms, negotiated readings occur when the audience only partly shares the dominant code in which a message has been transmitted. In this study, there were many instances of informants appearing to accept their assigned role as consumers of an ad or potential consumers of the brand, without accepting an ad's message "full and straight". Thus, some details of a particular ad were challenged, but on the whole, the advertiser's "definition of the situation" was still accepted. On other occasions, there was no overt challenge to an ad or ad element, but informants

distanced themselves from the role of consumer. Many negotiated readings could be described in terms of counterarguments, derogations of ad elements, and negative ad-related thoughts. Other negotiated readings did not sit easily in these categories. Thus, a new category - transparency treatment - was developed to accommodate these.

2.1. Counterarguments

Wright (1973) defines counterarguments as unfavourable statements about the idea or use of the advertised product. These challenge specific arguments or refer to undesirable product attributes or consequences of its use. They may also refer to the benefits of competing products, or to ways of solving a problem other than by buying the product.

As informants were often sceptical of product claims, there were many instances of specific ad arguments being refuted. Washing powder claims were frequently challenged, particularly in the case of Radion:

> It's just a stupid advert anyway because I don't believe any of this rubbish about it getting all the smells out. Any other one does anyway. [female worker 18-20]

Ads for other products suffered similar fates. For example,

> The whole advert strikes me as being a load of crap anyway: "This drink is in balance with all your body fluids". It's just, well, a fizzy drink, it's got lots of sugar in it, that's it. [male students 18-20]

> The cereals say that they're good for you and everything but they've all got sugar in them so they can't be very good for you. [female workers 18-20]

Product endorsers also suffered challenges to their credibility on occasion. This was particularly the case with celebrities, who were thought to be "raking it in" and therefore not always to be trusted in their professed regard for a brand. For example:

> "Oh, Paul Gascoigne buys this". Oh, so he does. Getting paid a nice healthy amount mind you. That annoys me. [female workers 18-20]

In some cases, claims were met with irony or sarcasm rather than contradiction. For example,

> Bold Three is better than Bold Two. I'll just wait for Bold Four then. [male student 18-20]

> Everyone said eight out ten cats preferred their brand, and that was about five different brands saying that...I always wondered how they worked that out like. [unemployed male 21-24]

Once again, informants did not limit their consideration to explicit verbal claims:

> There's a car one, it puts me off buying a car...I'd certainly never buy that car cos it looks as though it's got bad suspension...Vauxhall Nova, yeah. And I mean I know they're OK cars but as I said this advert, it's bouncing along to the traffic lights...trying to signify it's really nippy, but it's sort of bouncing in and out... [female graduate workers 21-24]

Similarly, not everyone was convinced by the Simplicity ads:

> - They're probably trying to say you'll never notice, but it's a tampon that you can carry wherever you want and nobody will know...
> - No, it isn't like that at all.
> - It's a stupid advert.
> - That's what they're trying to say, they're trying to say it's so well and nicely packaged that it's not like the conventional ones.
> - They're trying to say everybody's thick! [unemployed females 21-24]

Other counterarguments were in response to claims inferred from the appearance of models in ads, particularly in the case of cosmetics:

> It might make you look younger but it's no going to make you look beautiful, is it? [female workers 18-20]

> They always show you a beautiful model that you know, I mean, no matter what kind of make-up you've got, you're not going to look like her. [female graduate workers 21-24]

While cosmetic ads were seen as promising beauty, several informants thought that ads for confectionery or soft drinks implied that these products would have no adverse consequences. Thus, there were many sarcastic comments about "lassies with perfect complexions" and "really skinny women" who were shown "ramming chocolate bars down their throat". Someone challenged the Snickers "vox pop" ads in which people claimed to consume a bar a day:

> One's a ballet teacher. And I think if she ate one a day she'd be a big fat ballet teacher. [male workers 21-24, mixed]

Similarly, Coke ads were described as showing

> ...glamorous young people with perfect teeth despite the fact that they're drinking a dreadful, really sugary drink. [female students 21-24]

Where criticisms of ad elements related to the brand, these were considered counterarguments. The quality of production was sometimes used in this way, as poor quality ads were associated with inferior products:

> [Radion has] never had a good advert, it's always been cheap and nasty. The whole product seems cheap and nasty because of the advert. [unemployed females 21-24]

I mean you might also tend to think that because they've stuck on such a poor advert it might not be a very good place to go and eat. [male student 21-24]

Complaints about "irrelevant" or "pointless" advertising executions were also considered counter arguments, as informants were challenging the way in which these contributed to "the idea of the product".

2.2. Ad element derogation

While they often expressed approval or involvement with respect to ad elements, informants could also be very disparaging. Indeed, expressions of negative involvement, in cognitive, hedonic or emotional terms, tended to fall into this category. As examples of ad element derogation, we have seen how readily informants denounced "cardboard ads" and "studio jobs". At the other end of the cost spectrum, some people disliked the approach of the Gold Blend ads, describing them as "just so smooth". In other cases, the tone of ads was criticised, with labels such as "pretentious", "lifeless", "daft", or "false" being used. The enthusiasm of some endorsers was also too much for one group:

- I wish they'd concentrate it and just tell us about their products and stop all this EXCITEMENT, you know.
- "Woo! Hey! Do you want to go to Tillicoultry this weekend?" [male graduate workers 21-24]

Even aspects of well-liked ads were not immune to criticism. For example, a student was unimpressed by the choice of Edinburgh pub made by the character in the Tennent's "London" ad:

The thing that gets me about that advert is he gets off the train at Waverley, he walks to the top of The Mound, and then he ends up in Bianco's. He comes all the way back from London and goes to Bianco's for a drink! [laughter] [male students 21-24]

2.3. Transparency treatment

Informants treated ads as transparent in various ways. As we have seen in Chapter Seven, they sometimes commented on the objectives of particular ads. While these comments were not necessarily critical, they were offered when informants adopted the role of surrogate strategist. This suggests some distance from the role of consumer prescribed for them by the advertiser, and in this sense such comments may be considered negotiated rather than dominant.

Also reflecting their belief that they could "see through" ads, informants sometimes reduced an ad to the crudest expression of its basic proposition. Thus, an ad for Clearasil skin treatment was decoded as "buy this and get a bonk". Similarly,

> Buy this product and you will be instantly rich. [female workers 21-24]

> If you buy this you'll be terribly cool, if you do this you'll be noticed more kind of thing. [male worker 18-20]

While such comments may be described as a form of counterargument, these challenges were often particularly knowing, playful, and self-conscious. For example, a student commented that the Gold Blend ads featured "ideal images" of slim, beautiful, tall and tanned people. However, she doubted whether the product could transform its consumers, as

> Unless you do something with the coffee like paint it on your legs though you won't get tanned. [female students 18-20]

There was also some discussion of the transformational powers of other products. Thus, another student complained that Ragu sauce, meant to be "so Italian that it makes you Italian", had not worked for her. Similarly,

> - Gillette, it's just all this kind of "if you use this you'll grow from an eight stone weakling to a big Joe". Come off it!
> - It worked for me! [laughter] [male graduate workers 21-24]

Another version of the transparency treatment involved "seeing through" particular ad elements to the advertising formula or convention being used. When they did this, they acted not so much as the consumer of that ad, but as the jaded consumer of many ads. Washing powder ads in particular were subjected to this treatment:

> They're always on about - I think they assume everybody wears white clothes all the time, has white sheets and towels. [unemployed male 18-20]

> - There are some that tell you to buy it cos it's wonderful.
> And they compare it with someone's usual product.
> - And they say "Would you take two of your original for this?". And they say [puts on singsong voice] "Oh no, I wouldn't part with it". I would, cos they're cheaper [laughter]. [female students 18-20]

2.4. Negative ad-related thoughts

There were also several strands of negative ad-related thoughts. One of these involved general statements of dislike or disparagement, whereby particular ads were described as "pathetic", "awful", "horrific", and so on. On other occasions,

aspersions were cast on the originator of the ad. For example, the student who was unimpressed with the Clydesdale Bank's "youth" ads visualised the advertising executive dredging up cliched approaches to "appeal to the kids".

Other negative comments explicitly related ads or ad elements to informants' own lives and experiences. For example, we have seen how a student's criticism of the "leather bush hat" worn by the son in the Nationwide Anglia ad was based on his own experiences in Sri Lanka. On a more mundane level, elements of confectionery ads also came off badly from comparisons with informants' personal experience:

> ...it's maybe nice for guys, but you know, this woman seductively eating her Flake, it just does nothing for me. Because when you buy a Flake, it goes all over you. It melts on your clothes [laughter]. [female workers 18-20]

> The woman that's usually on the adverts eats a bar of chocolate. You know, very seductive, a little taste of it, and it's like "Mm, lovely". And you think "No, you just cram it all in". [female students 21-24]

3. OPPOSITIONAL READINGS

According to Morley (1974), an oppositional reading occurs when the audience does not share the dominant code of a message. In this study, there were various occasions where informants firmly rejected the advertiser's "definition of the situation" and reworked the message in an alternative frame of reference. This often involved stepping outside the role of potential consumer and commenting on the ad as a social critic. Once again, the cognitive response categories of counterargument, ad element derogation, and ad-related thoughts provided the starting-point in accounting for such readings.

3.1. Counterarguments

We have already seen examples of informants making negotiated readings by rejecting specific ad claims or propositions. Some counterarguments went further than this, however, suggesting greater distance between advertiser and audience. For example, an unemployed informant clearly felt that car advertisers were worlds apart from her:

> "Only £16,000". I like how they say "only" [laughter]. We're sitting there saying "If I had that I'd be over the moon". [unemployed females 18-20]

Other decodings seemed to resist advertising messages at a more global, fundamental, or even ideological level. This was the case with the graduate workers who accused the Nationwide Anglia ad of "ideologically just battering you":

> The messages that that tells you, the whole package that it's saying...
> [male graduate workers 21-24]

Once again, counterarguments were sometimes met with sarcasm. Thus, someone described American ads offering credit:

> "Have you been refused credit? Don't worry, we'll give you credit...it doesn't matter if you're so much overdrawn, we'll give you credit, just sign away your house... [male students 21-24]

3.2. Ad element derogation

Oppositional criticisms of ad elements tended to be concerned about the way in which ad elements endorsed or promoted certain values. The way in which characters were portrayed tended to come in for a great deal of criticism in this respect. For example, we have seen how a student disapproved of the way in which the little girl in the Volkswagen ad was whisked away from the poverty of the New York streets. Other comments were related to notions of class:

> - Oh I hate the [Gold Blend] woman and I hate the man and...you know, they deserve each other. They're just both obnoxious...terribly middle class...
> - It's the same idea as the Cointreau adverts, remember the sort of snobby English woman.
> [female students 21-24]

> I forget what he says but it's something like "It's really healthy for you". Who cares what he thinks? Dead rich, sitting in his nice kitchen, talking about healthy eating. Who cares?
> [unemployed males 18-20]

Many criticisms of role portrayals fell into this category. For example,

> Lenor...has two girls comparing how high their towels are with the fabric conditioner, which is totally sexist and just perpetuating the myth that women stay in the house, which really gets to me. [unemployed female 21-24]

3.3. Transparency treatment

When oppositional readings of ad elements moved beyond particular ads to identify conventions or formulae, these were classified as transparency treatments. Comments on advertising stereotypes of gender, family and "perfect people" often fell into this category. For example,

Your washing up liquid adverts insult your intelligence: mother, father two and a half kids, and everything's perfect. [male students 18-20]

I suppose all these adverts think the woman, all women think about is getting their washing, doing their washing all day [female student 18-20]

On some occasions, when informants reduced ads to a basic proposition, they did this in a way which suggested an oppositional rather than negotiated reading. For example, discussing concern about the way in which ads promoted products as solutions to all kinds of problems, one group referred to the Gold Blend ads:

- "Become sophisticated by buying Gold Blend".
- "And you'll instantly have gold earrings to take off when you answer the phone or whatever". That's kind of dodgy. [female students 21-24]

However, such treatments were less common in oppositional readings. This may reflect the greater seriousness of resistance to ads at this level, rendering playful and self-conscious approaches less appropriate.

3.4. Negative ad-related thoughts

Oppositional readings in this category frequently referred to the originators of an ad or their motivations. For example, a group of students ridiculed the iceberg imagery in the AIDS ad ("like sex is a mystery, sex is an iceberg"), and went on to agree that

- It's very much a Government advert.

- It's true, they try to convince you of things you don't want convinced of.
[male graduate workers 21-24]

Indeed, the hypocrisy of the Government and advertisers was mentioned in relation to cigarette ads by several informants, with the consensus being that "if they're interested in health, stop advertising". Many concerns about the social consequences of ads and advertising may also be placed in this category. For example:

It's not too good to associate smoking with playing sport...[youngsters will] see cigarettes every time they go to play sports. They might get to thinking... [male students 18-20]

It gives someone more idea of when they have a family, what their family should be like. If a bairn is watching this he thinks "But this family's not like this, we must be different". It'll start them thinking that the way on the telly's the way it should be.
[unemployed females 18-20]

4. ABERRANT READINGS

While he is reluctant to attribute too many discrepancies between encodings and decodings to selective perception, Hall (1973) recognises that differences may arise due to idiosyncratic or aberrant decodings. Certainly, the positive enjoyment of ads such as those for Martin's Plant Hire may seem idiosyncratic, but could be explained in terms of informants' desire to demonstrate their competence and independence as advertising consumers. Another informant offered an unusual interpretation of a Benson and Hedges ad, which showed the gold cigarette pack inside a birdcage:

> I think it was trying to tell us that cigarettes were bad for you and they should be locked away under lock and key...but at the same time they're trying to sell them as well, which is pretty stupid...maybe it tries to make people see them in a good light so they will buy them, saying "We're trying to stop cigarettes" [so that people will think] "Can't be that bad, I'll buy them".
> [unemployed males 18-20]

Even here, there is a trace of a positional difference between encoder and decoder: this informant, in common with many others, was wary of accepting the cigarette companies' "definition of the situation", and is aware of the subtleties and obscurities of their ads. It may be that these factors combined to confuse his interpretation of this particular ad.

Nonetheless, informants did offer some unusual readings of ads which did not seem related to positional differences. For example, someone had a unique view of Nanette Newman in the Fairy Liquid ads:

> I mean she's very sort of whimsical. Soft. She reminds me of soft white doughy bread for some reason. [unemployed female 21-24]

Similarly, a male student suggested that the Lucozade ads in which John Barnes kicked a can into a bin had more to do with presenting an anti-litter message than referring to the footballer's goal-scoring prowess.

A few informants offered confused readings of the McEwan's and Guinness ads which others had decoded with ease. For example, a female worker "didn't understand" the "weird", "spooky" and "horrible" McEwan's ad featuring "trampy evil looking people pushing balls up a hill". She also talked about the Guinness "dark glasses" ad, which someone else had interpreted as a reference to both sunglasses and the product's appearance:

> [Rutger Hauer] gets up and walks away and all the women on the sun loungers are up to their necks in water in a swimming pool and he is still waffling on about something that isn't anything to do with these women. But none of they adverts makes sense anyway.
>
> [female worker 18-20]

Many people remarked that they would feel stupid if they did not understand an ad, so it may be that they felt inhibited from talking about ads whose meaning they had not worked out to their own satisfaction. While there were many instances where informants did express uncertainty about interpretations, confused readings of ads were scarce. There were many idiosyncratic readings, but these were often linked to informants' advertising involvement. Thus, people picked up on very small details in ads, which often meant something to them in the context of their own lives: for example, we have seen how a male student focused on the "leather bush hat" in the Nationwide Anglia ad. On other occasions, they offered particularly evocative interpretations of ads because they were willing to engage with its imagery, as often happened with the McEwan's ads.

5. CONCLUSIONS

This analysis suggests that the traditional cognitive response categories in isolation provide an impoverished and incomplete account of young adults' decodings of ads, obscuring the sophistication, playfulness and irony of many decodings. The traditional frameworks also restrict analysis to positive, negative and neutral comments, failing to capture the different levels of resistance to ads.

This analysis, then, involved making some modifications to cognitive response categories in order to reflect the range, subtlety, and variation in tone of the young adults' decodings. The use of advertising imagery to make brand inferences was emphasised in the support argument and counterargument categories, and a category labelled "transparency treatment" was introduced to reflect informant's identification of advertising objectives, basic propositions and formulae. Hall's (1973) dominant-negotiated-oppositional framework was also incorporated into the analysis, and this resulted in a richer framework for describing informants' decodings of ads and advertising.

Dominant readings, where informants accepted the advertiser's "definition of the situation" full and straight, tended to focus on interpretations of individual ads, although these were often related to informants' own lives. Negotiated readings,

where some aspect of the advertiser's message was challenged, tended to draw more explicitly on informants' cumulative experience of advertising, products, and life in general. Oppositional readings, which rejected advertisers' messages and reworked them in alternative frames of reference, invariably related ads to society at large or to particular aspects of social structure.

Consideration of the young adults' decodings in this way not only provides further evidence of their advertising sophistication. It also offers greater insight into the active nature of their advertising encounters: here we can see them making their own meanings from ads, creating these from the interaction between particular ads, advertising in general, and their own experiences, values, attitudes, and social conditions.

Finally, given Morley's (1986) concerns about the coherence of decodings across social situations, it is interesting to consider what patterns, if any, emerged in this study. Differences in the experience of advertising between male and female, younger and older, student, working and unemployed informants are examined in the next chapter. However, there appeared to be no one decoding position adopted by particular groups or even informants: they made a dominant reading of one ad, negotiated the meaning of another, and completely opposed an advertiser's "definition of the situation" on another occasion. This should not be surprising, however: an ad's meaning emerges from its interaction with the environment and audience members, each coming to an ad with particular experience, social positions, and feelings. Given the multidimensional nature of people's subjective identities, and of the ads with which they interact, it would be inconceivable for them to relate to all ads from a single decoding position. This is presumably reassuring for advertisers, as at least it suggests that someone who steps outside the advertiser-consumer relationship to make an oppositional reading is not irredeemably out of reach. However, the range and quantity of negotiated and oppositional readings identified in this study serve to emphasise that the young adults' encounters with ads are for their own benefit and purpose, and these are not necessarily consistent with the advertiser's intentions.

CHAPTER TWELVE

CONTRASTING EXPERIENCES OF ADVERTISING

One of this study's objectives was to explore differences in advertising experiences between young adults according to their age, gender and occupational status. Possible reasons for such differences were discussed in Chapter Five, but informants' social positions were not expected to determine their advertising experiences. As Dyer (1977, in Morley 1986:43) argues, our social situation implies access to certain cultural codes, but our reading of particular texts also depends on how we feel about our lives.

This view is certainly consistent with this study's findings. It soon became clear that no crude distinctions could be made between informants on the basis of age, gender or occupational status. All the young adults appeared to have a complex and ambivalent relationship with advertising. They all displayed competence in consuming ads, and the roles of casual cognoscenti, surrogate strategists, and social critics were played across each social group. Involvement with advertising, ads, or ad elements was evident throughout the sample, as were multiple advertising uses and dominant, negotiated and oppositional readings. Thus, differences between social groups could not be reported in terms of the presence or absence of involvement or dominant readings, for example. Indeed, the differences between informants were frequently as subtle and complex as their understanding of advertising itself.

This chapter first compares advertising experiences across the boundaries of age and gender. It then considers distinctive aspects of experiences among students, workers and unemployed informants. Finally, it considers the implications of such differential experiences of advertising.

1. AGE DIFFERENCES

As expected, given the narrow age-band used in this study, few differences in the pattern of advertising experiences could be attributed to age. Some differences did emerge, however, and these are discussed below.

1.1. Socialisation as consumers of goods and services

As we have seen, ads for furniture and household products were not generally liked. This seemed partly due to the way in which they were presented, but the younger informants also seemed to find the products themselves particularly irrelevant and uninteresting:

> Sterling's like for people who like furniture I suppose. Well older people. Maybe I just think that cos I'm young. [female workers 18-20]

While some of the 18-20 year-olds recognised that they might find such ads more interesting in the future, it was the older informants who were less dismissive of them and more open to their future relevance.

In general, it seemed that older informants were socialised to a greater extent into the role of consumers of goods and services. Indeed, a younger student suggested that her age-group had a less materialistic outlook on life than those who were older:

> In the 1980s, it's been very much a sort of go for it, get as much money as possible, get all the goods you can. And so, having been brought up with that all our lives, I don't think it's affected us in that we want all this. Cos I suppose like, if you're in your twenties you would want that sort of thing...we're after that sort of thing, and people tend to knock back the decade before. [female students 18-20]

If there was a difference in the degree of socialisation, this might account for some other differences between the two age groups. Thus, 21-24 year-olds seemed to have more marketing-related uses for advertising. While they also consumed many ads independently of the featured brand, their attitudes and involvement seemed to be related to product use more than was the case with younger informants. For example,

> I remember I used to be more aware of what the Silk Cut adverts were when I used to smoke Silk Cut. [female student 21-24]

This is not to say that older informants had become sanguine about their relationship with advertising. Perhaps their greater cumulative experience had contributed to the stronger sense of wariness which they expressed regarding the effects of advertising,

particularly at unconscious levels:

> I'd like to think it doesn't work on me but I'm sure it does. [male worker 21-24]

> You don't realise that they do influence you, but they do. But you don't realise. [unemployed females 21-24]

However, the greater wariness of 21-24 year-olds was not carried through to other aspects of their attitudes, and the patterns which emerged varied from the group discussions to the individual interviews. Thus, in the groups, older informants offered more examples of ads "working" on them. At the same time, however, they tended to be more dismissive of advertising than the 18-20 year-olds, and to profess more immunity from its effects:

> Once you actually get there [to the shop] you make the choice. You don't think "What advert did I see last night?". You go and see what's best. [male workers 21-24, mixed]

In the individual interviews, these positions were reversed: it was the younger informants who expressed the greatest confidence that they were immune to advertising, but they also provided more examples of occasions where ads had "worked" on them in some way.

1.2. Criticism and enjoyment of advertising

Even if older informants were more socialised into the role of consumers of goods and services, they did not express different values with respect to consumption. Indeed, they expressed more concern about advertising's role in encouraging materialism than younger informants. Perhaps this was something they were more conscious of as they began to approach advertising more from the perspective of potential purchasers themselves.

Older informants generally took a more critical stance on advertising. While the 18-20 year-olds tended to be complimentary about those working in advertising, the 21-24 year-olds were much more cynical and critical in their comments. Indeed, the phrases "a bit of a maggot", "bastards", and "crawl and then stab" all came from older informants.

In addition to their criticisms of advertising's role in encouraging materialism, older informants expressed a great deal of concern and a sophisticated analysis of stereotypical advertising portrayals. Thus, it is not surprising that in terms of decodings, the older age group tended to make more oppositional readings. In some

cases, this took the form of counterarguments, but their disputes were often expressed as formula identifications, as they broadened discussion from particular cases to groups of ads or advertising in general.

While older informants were more critical of advertising, this did not seem to interfere with their enjoyment of it. They seemed to be at least as playful as the 18-20 year-olds in their approach to it, and seemed particularly likely to incorporate it in their jokes and conversations with others. Older informants also talked more about using ads to check out the opposite sex:

> ...you want to see some guys in laundrettes with no trousers [laughter]! [female workers 21-24]

> ...it's quite impressive cos she's quite good looking. We always watch that and have a good viewing of that! [male graduate worker 21-24]

The extent of older informants' enjoyment and playfulness with respect to advertising seems surprising, as we might expect them to be more serious about advertising than their younger counterparts: in addition to their socialisation into the role of consumers of goods and services, they seemed particularly wary of advertising's effects and concerned about its role in society. This once again highlights the ambivalence of young adults' attitudes to advertising. It could also be argued that older informants' enjoyment is related to the evolution of advertising in recent years. They, more than the 18-20 year-olds, may have noticed and appreciated the changes, and become more willing to engage with and enjoy it as a result.

2. GENDER DIFFERENCES

In this study, several differences emerged in male and female informants' experience of advertising. Some of these related directly to gender portrayals and gendered products, but there were also some differences in their general approach to and elaboration of ads.

2.1. Gender portrayals

Female informants expressed more concern about stereotyped portrayals in advertising than their male counterparts. Reflecting this, formula identifications featured more prominently in women's oppositional decodings. For example, while they acknowledged that "there are women in kitchens", they criticised portrayals of women as housewives, constantly washing, cooking and cleaning up for their husbands and children.

> Superwoman with her Flash cleaning liquid. "One moment, kiddiwinks, while I clean the place and get your dinner ready for you". [female students 18-20]

Portrayals of women as glamorous and attractive to men came in for more criticism than those of women as housewives. In Morley's (1980, 1986) terms, it is perhaps not so much that female informants had greater access to such cultural codes and competencies, but that they had a heightened awareness of the damage which these codes could cause. As we have seen, they tended to treat the women in ads as role models, and compare themselves with advertising images:

> Like the Timotei adverts, those adverts just make me physically sick. I hate them because all these women with their hair down to their backsides and so beautiful and skinny. It's really sickening, especially that red-haired one, she makes me so jealous. [female worker 18-20]

This is not to say that the men in this study did not express concern about the portrayal of women in ads; as we have seen, some men discussed this issue in detail. Indeed, in the mixed male group, the discussion began with someone commenting that he found sexism in ads annoying. Several men suggested that women may feel insulted or resentful of their portrayals. Others discussed how idealised portrayals may make real women feel inadequate or resentful, and encourage diets and eating disorders.

> People like my girlfriend look at adverts, see a skinny looking lady...they feel as if they should look like that. [male worker 18-20]

Despite their concerns about the pressures placed on them by portrayals of attractive women in ads, it was female informants who talked more about checking out the opposite sex. As this research was conducted by a woman, male informants may have felt constrained in discussing their reaction to women in ads. There was some discussion of this issue with the group of male graduate workers. At the end, someone asked why the group had been all male, and whether women were also going to be interviewed. They were told that there had been some concern that

mixing the groups would inhibit discussion. The researcher then suggested that interviews of all-male groups might not be so effective anyway, as they were conducted by a woman. At this point, she was reassured by several members that she did not really count as a woman, because she was "just the researcher". It would certainly be naive to accept such a protestation at face value. However, there were indications elsewhere that the presence of a female researcher did not completely inhibit male informants from expressing less progressive attitudes towards women. This was particularly noticeable in the groups, where the men clearly were in the majority. Thus, several students and workers referred to women as "wifies" or "birds". A group of male workers talked about a Diet Coke ad in which a woman was pursued by a man, and eluded him "just as he thinks he's got her cornered". Indeed, it was in that group that a Sun reader described how he tackled his newspaper:

> Back page, sport, problem page, Page Three, and that's it. Throw it away. [male workers 18-20]

2.2. Gendered products

Both male and female informants noticed that particular product categories tended to be targeted at men or women:

> [Car ads] using all these females are quite sexist...I think they think it's only men that buy these cars. [female workers 21-24]

> Nobody's every tried to sell me washing powder in my life...to a male audience, not once. [male graduate workers 21-24]

Clearly, there are good biological reasons for feminine hygiene ads not catering to a male audience. Given the "unmentionable" aura surrounding such products, it was interesting to note the different ways in which these ads were received. As we have seen, the women tended to find them embarrassing or annoying, particularly on television. Male informants had little time for such sensibilities, although they did not want to be caught whistling the Simplicity jingle as they walked down the street. They tended to discuss these ads in terms of censorship. Thus, a male student associated the advent of tampon ads with "more openness of more and more things", and another referred to

> [It's] just like a paranoia about things to do with sex. It was only ten years ago that tampon advertisements were allowed on television. [male students 21-24]

> They probably ban too much if anything. I mean you hear of things like tampons and that being banned, like they can't actually show the tampon. (male worker 21-24)

While some of the embarrassment surrounding feminine hygiene ads may be related to the product's sexual connotations, there was little sense of any such inhibition surrounding the Hamlet "World Cup" ad featuring the player struck by a football in the nether regions. As a male student put it, "the guys were wincing at that one", but still managed to enjoy it and laugh about it in the pub. Women seemed to find this ad particularly entertaining:

> I was just about crying with laughter the first time I seen that...all the guys go like that [gestures]... [female worker 18-20]

Indeed, a student who was particularly embarrassed at seeing feminine hygiene ads in mixed company had no such concerns about the Hamlet ad:

> ...And there were all the guys standing at the wall. And it focuses on this one guy going like that [gestures] he was really scared of it, and of course he turned round [laughter] and the other guy came up and took a shot and it hit off the post and came back and...hit him [laughter] [female students 18-20]

Indeed, she commented that the ad "totally broke the ice" when it cropped up as she watched football on television with male family members.

The contrast between the women's attitudes to feminine hygiene ads and the Hamlet one is interesting. Certainly, the Hamlet ad was designed to give pleasure, which can hardly be said of feminine hygiene ads or products. However, it still seems interesting that ads associated with women's sexuality were embarrassing, while one concerning men's sexual identity met with peals of laughter. Perhaps there are simply fewer taboos and inhibitions surrounding representations of male bodies. Perhaps it was the novelty of an ad focusing on male rather than female body parts which was enjoyed, especially because it makes fun of them. Given that the women seemed to use ads to check out the opposite sex more than the men, it could be argued that their enjoyment of the Hamlet ad relates to this: both may be seen as a way of countering a culture in which women have traditionally been looked at and men have done the looking, laughing, and judging.

2.3. Approach to advertising

To some extent, female informants seemed to approach advertising as potential consumers of goods and services more than their male counterparts. This is perhaps not surprising; as an unemployed informant put it, "it's the women who really do the messages". Thus, while the women seemed to treat advertising as a distinct entity

just as much as the men, they referred to more marketing uses of advertising.

Following on from this, as might be expected, female groups expressed slightly more consistent attitudes to ads and brands than male groups, and they offered more examples of ads having "worked" on them, particularly in terms of wanting confectionery or soft drinks. However, again emphasising the dangers of generalising, this was not the case in the individual interviews: individual men offered as many examples of ads "working" on them, and their discussion of ads seemed to be related to the featured products more often.

In general, female informants seemed more playful and ironic in their approach to advertising. Thus, although the men talked more about using ads for diversion, women seemed to use them more for entertainment and play. Thus, it was the women who talked more about using ads as posters or cutting them up to make collages. Women also tended to offer the more extreme examples of watching and waiting for particular ads:

> They were advertising for the advert, "watch tonight at 8 o'clock and it's on". So I was tuned into the telly at 8 o'clock ready to watch my advert! [unemployed females 21-24]

> The dog one as well, I sat up waiting all night for the dog. I was on my third night and it came on. It was only on about 12 at night. [female students 18-20]

While everyone seemed to talk about ads and advertising to others, women mentioned this more than men. They also reported more singing along with ads as they came on, particularly when they were watching television with friends. This is partly consistent with Morley's (1986) findings regarding gender differences in the consumption of television programmes: women tended to talk to others about programmes, while men rarely admitted to doing so.

Male informants, while not lacking a sense of playfulness, seemed to approach advertising from a more analytical perspective. They were more prone to playing the roles of surrogate strategists and casual cognoscenti, and tended to protest their immunity from persuasion to a greater extent than women. They also tended to discuss advertising objectives more than the women in this study, perhaps reflecting

the male tendency to search for "authorial intent" noted by Stern (1993) in the field of literary criticism.

Male informants also seemed more prone to counterargue, at least in the group discussions. While this may be interpreted as suggesting a more analytical approach, it may also reflect different defensive strategies. Thus, the men appeared to resist particular messages through direct confrontation, whereas the women tended to be more subtle in their opposition, using irony and transparency treatments with regard to the basic propositions in ads. However, in the individual interviews, several women displayed a more confrontational style.

While advertising was not considered particularly informative, it was the men who tended to suggest a potential educational role of advertising. For example, a group of male workers suggested that ads for environmentally friendly products may teach people about green issues. Similarly,

> ...what might be good is like a cereal going on about how important your fibre is or something... [male student 18-20]

Male informants' less playful and more analytical perspective did not translate into a more critical stance on advertising generally. While the most critical comments regarding advertising industry workers tended to come from men, male and female informants expressed quite similar levels of concern about the social effects of advertising. Overall, women expressed more concern about issues of stereotyping, and they were generally more critical of advertising in the individual interviews. In the group discussions, however, men tended to express more concern about the economic effects of advertising, issues of materialism, and the promotion of potentially harmful products.

2.4. Elaboration of ads

As noted in Chapter Five, Meyers-Levy and Sternthal (1991) found that women tend to offer more associative, imagery-laced interpretations and elaborate descriptions of non-verbal stimuli, and that, perhaps due to a greater "communion" orientation, they seemed to have a lower threshhold for elaborating on environmental cues such as advertising messages.

Such differences did not emerge clearly in this study. Certainly, female informants made fewer claims about the low salience of advertising in their lives, perhaps

reflecting a greater communion orientation on their part. While several male informants expressed empathy with the characters in ads, it tended to be the women who offered the most detailed elaborations concerning the personality of those characters.

In the group discussions, the women tended to embellish their descriptions of ads more than the men. For example, it was a woman who described the Galaxy Ripple ad as "chocolate put on film" and talked about how the model's dress fell into ripples. However, male groups also offered many detailed descriptions and evocative interpretations of ads. Thus, it was a male worker who offered the long account of the Tennent's "London" ad. In the individual interviews, male informants did not seem any less prone to elaboration than the women. For example, it was a male worker who described the blood transfusion service ad as "striking a chord" and offered a detailed description of the ad and his response to it. Indeed, some male informants demonstrated an astounding recall of the detail in many ads. For example, a student described an ad for Yellow Pages:

> ...he's had the party, and his Mum and Dad are away and there's a scratch on the table and they have to tidy up the whole house and he has to get the French polishers in. And then his Mum 'phones up, and you know, he just gets to the 'phone before the girl just appeared in the room from somewhere. He gets to it and says "Oh yes, everything's fine", you know. And the table has all been cleaned up and he thinks "Great!". And then he looks around and sees the painting on the wall that's been drawn spectacles on or something like that, and that's just, you know, a clever wee twist at the end... [male student 21-24]

Similarly, the male worker who had been so impressed by the blood transfusion ad talked about an ad for Beck's beer:

> It starts off, they go to - it looks as if it's a wine bar, but the old-fashioned type bar as well. The barman's behind the bar with the old apron on. It basically immediately puts forward quality. Quality bars are basically better than the disco bars you get now...First of all two, I suppose you could call bimbos, blond bimbos, sitting on a couple of barstools drinking cocktails. So basically they're slagging them off. Not that I've got anything against bimbos! Then it goes to a, speaking to another old gentleman having gin and tonics and slagging him off. Then it goes to [someone] talking to another, a younger girl, saying "I'm going to make a film and you can be in this film" what kind of film it's going to be. And he goes on to this gentleman ordering a beer at the bar. Something like "Wulfwaffa" or something like that he asks for, and he says "If it's going to be a beer, it's got to be German". You probably know the advert yourself. And then he turns round, the barman and says you know, "He's got a good point there, but the beer he's talking about isn't German, it's brewed somewhere up the A1". And he goes to the other guy, and it's just an ordinary guy. But the first guy was a yuppie, no common sense but extremely intelligent. You know the type I'm sure. And the last person, that's the person who was going to order Beck's, and behind the bar all you can see is Becks right along...This guy orders: "Can I have a Beck's, plese?". The yuppie says "Oh, a bit of a cider man, are you?". So, immediately slags him off again which is a really good advert for Becks.
>
> [male worker 18-20]

It may be that differences in the groups between male and female informants had less to do with elaboration propensities or threshholds, and more to do with how they sometimes expressed themselves. Morley (1986) suggested that women's tendency to discuss television programmes with others might be related to the more expressive cultural codes of femininity. Within several male groups, there was a sense of ads being discussed in a form of shorthand. Thus, as we have seen earlier, while a young worker's account of the Tennent's ad was ostensibly a simple description, it also communicated a great deal about his values concerning work, women and Scotland. In several male groups, ads were described in very economical terms, as indicated by these exchanges concerning the Hamlet "World Cup" and Levi's "poolroom" ads:

- At the bar, was it?
- Aye, and it bounces back. [male workers 21-24]

- I like the one with Sham 69, not Sham 69, Clash. That was quite a good one.
- Is that about the one at the pool?
- The guy loses his trousers. That's quite a good one. [male workers 18-20]

Thus, it may be that among some of the male informants, a sense of shared understanding was achieved without much need to expand. This, of course, is not to say that greater internal elaboration of ads did not take place.

3. DIFFERENCES ACCORDING TO OCCUPATIONAL STATUS

Although there was a great deal of variation within the occupational groups, several distinctive aspects of advertising experiences were identified among students, workers, graduate workers and unemployed informants.

3.1. Students

The students who participated in this research were taking a wide range of courses, including law, chemistry, history, nursing studies and medicine. In some cases, it was the kind of course which they were taking which seemed related to their comments about advertising. For example, the older female group, containing two nurses and a medical student, expressed a great deal of concern about the way in which family units were portrayed. In general, however, students' experiences of advertising appeared to have several common strands, which were not so evident

among the other occupational groups. These were related to characteristics attributed to students by Sears (1986), such as their later entry than others into the workforce, well-developed analytical skills, and less crystallised attitudes.

3.1.1. Deferred purchasing power

While they did not claim to be experiencing serious hardship, students made many passing references to their current lack of spending power: for example, they seemed very aware of "cheap nights" at the cinema. A sense of financial constraint was also apparent in various comments about ads. Thus, there was some discussion of the various inducements offered by banks to students opening acccounts with them, and an awareness of the respective merits of the deals. Indeed, the student who resented the "patronising" Clydesdale Bank ad still opened an account there, because it offered £15 and free banking, while a competitor only offered discount vouchers for records. Perhaps reflecting their own experiences, students were generally very sceptical of ads showing friendly bank managers:

> They're very much "The bank that likes to say yes", but if you're stupid and go to see a bank manager... [male students 21-24]

> ...I can't imagine my bank manager having the time to patronise a child about his savings, you know. [female student 21-24]

A lack of financial resources was also reflected in their comments about other ads. Thus, several students mentioned that regardless of the advertising, they usually bought the cheapest brand of grocery products. However, several people reported different priorities if their parents were paying. For example, a student who was very taken with Nanette Newman's endorsement of Fairy Liquid commented that

> ...if I was going to get my Mum to buy my stuff I'd get her to buy Fairy Liquid, but if I was paying for it, I'd probably go for the cheap one. [male student 18-20]

Others commented that they could not afford the kind of products advertised in magazines, and there was sometimes an air of resentment or resignation when they mentioned ads for products beyond their means:

> [Holiday advertising] annoys me. Because it's blowing a gale outside, it's freezing cold...And then you have these adverts and you know not going to go, I'm not going to go on these holidays. [female students 18-20]

> I think if I was a yuppie down in London with money to burn, I'd maybe look through the adverts and think "Good, I could fair go for one of those", but it's not the case so it doesn't really apply to me. [male student 21-24]

Nonetheless, students had a sense of their appeal to marketers and advertisers. They were well aware of the banks' interest in their business, and they saw "people our age" as the target market for products such as jeans and beer. They also seemed optimistic about their future purchasing power, seeing themselves as deferring certain purchases rather than forgoing them indefinitely. Thus, several students mentioned that once they were older and had homes of their own to furnish, they would probably be more interested in ads for carpets, furniture and electrical appliances. A sense of deferred purchasing was also evident in several comments about car ads. For example, a male student said that he would read some car ads, "cos it's something I'll never have for a few years". Another student said that she liked looking at some car ads, "but I know that I'll never, ever get it". "Never, ever" did not seem to mean quite that, however, as she later remarked that

> Sometimes when you see the cars on television you think "I'll save up and get myself one of them". [female students 18-20]

We have already seen that there were many possible reasons for young adults liking or becoming involved with an ad regardless of their attitude to the featured product or brand. In some cases students expressed consistent attitudes to ads and brands. As a male student observed, they generally liked ads for products such as jeans, alcohol, and cigarettes, because the ads used music, styles and imagery which appealed to them. There were also some cases of consistent negative attitudes. Thus, several students thought that the Radion ads would "put them off" buying that brand. Such consistency is easily achieved, however, given the low involvement nature of that purchase to them, and the range of competitively priced substitutes available: as we have seen, the student who "hated" the Clydesdale Bank ad could not afford to let this influence his banking decision.

Overall, students' consumption of ads seemed to be the most divorced from the products or brands which they featured. Students frequently talked about how they liked ads for products or brands which they disliked or which held no interest for them. As a student who "loved" the McEwan's ads put it, "no matter what they do I'll never drink the stuff". Similarly,

> Quite often you look at an advert and you're not thinking "Oh, that's a nice product", you're thinking "That's nice music or a nice idea". [male students 21-24]

Thus, it is not surprising that students frequently expressed involvement with the characters, situations, humour or puzzles in ads, and with advertising in general. Thus, it was a student who regretted missing seven and a half hours of "the best

adverts of all time".

Such independent consumption of ads may be related to students' sense of deferred purchasing power: their current financial constraints may encourage some detachment from many advertised products, but their expectations of future spending power may encourage them not to withdraw from or resent the world of advertising in the meantime.

3.1.2. Analytical and elitist perspectives

Many of the students' comments suggested that they considered themselves particularly skilled in analytical modes of thought. One male student prided himself on his ability to "look into things", and another described how "you really do find yourself reading into things". Indeed, he sometimes saw this as a hindrance, because even reading "a cheap pulp novel", he would be trying to see if there were more to it than there seemed.

This inclination to "read into things" carried through to their comments on advertising. For example, a male student wanted "to see the permutations that advertising people come up with" on a theme, and another was "intrigued" by what he thought the Red Stripe ads were trying to do. Rather than dismissing the Radion ads, he suggested that

> ...it's something no-one else has done. No one else has made an absolutely crap advert and got away with it...It's quite clever in the timing: just as everyone else is getting more complex and in depth...they're just building a barbecue and getting all sweaty. [male students 21-24]

Students also expressed a great deal of cognitive involvement with ads and ad elements, talking about the need to "concentrate" so that they would not miss the jokes in the Holsten Pils ads, for example. Similarly,

> I sat looking at it all Saturday afternoon, trying to work out what it was. [male students 18-20]

While informants generally demonstrated a sophisticated understanding of advertising, students were particularly convincing when they played the roles of competent consumers and casual cognoscenti. They decoded many complex ads with ease, and were particularly aware of trends in advertising. They employed an impressive strategic and technical vocabulary, and discussed different advertising approaches and production issues in detail.

Students sometimes turned their analytical approach to bear on themselves. They seemed more selfconscious than others, and were particularly prone to comment on their own responses to ads or issues raised in discussion. For example, it was a male student who observed that "the adverts that we like are the ones for things that we're interested in". Perhaps that is why he was so troubled by the way in which the ads for women's tights appealed to him! In another group, someone suggested that people were perfectly entitled to complain about ads which they found offensive:

> - Cos I mean if you don't agree with something you should certainly put forward your view.
> - That's students speaking, isn't it? [female students 21-24]

In considering their own reaction to advertising, students seemed particularly keen to assert their immunity to persuasion:

> It's like an ego thing. You think "I want to be in control of this, I want to know what they're trying to do to me". You want to know you're above it. [male students 18-20]

Thus, it may not be surprising that students more than others referred to ads as "insulting your intelligence". There were also some indications that students (particularly the men) considered themselves better equipped than others to withstand the persuasive powers of advertising. Thus, a male student discussed the brand of jeans "your average punter" might choose in response to different ads; clearly he did not consider himself one of the hoi polloi. Others were more overtly elitist:

> You get to realise, it's like, this is going to sound bad. But you've been at university and you're above your average Sun reader level who takes everything at face value...
> [male students 18-20]

> I do hope I've got more intelligence than the person who reads the Daily Record. I hope I've got the intelligence when I'm looking for a hi-fi to go round, no matter what the make, to get the best one, not the one on the telly. [malestudents 18-20]

Turning to students' attitudes to the institution of advertising, further traces of their analytical approach were found. In the first place, they tended to see issues as more open to debate than did other informants:

> Someone told me the point of it and someone else said that they thought it was disgusting, and I sort of saw both sides of that argument, like. [male student 18-20]

> Well I've got to say I can't remember ever seeing an advert that has offended me, but again, everyone's entitled to their point of view... [male student 21-24]

Nonetheless, student groups were more critical of advertising than others, although in the individual interviews it was the unemployed informants who disapproved

most. Many of the strongest expressions of disapproval came from students. Thus, as we have seen, it was a student who criticised ICI's corporate advertising:

> They are the world's number one exploiters, and they'd have us believe they're the ones that are preventing starvation, cataracts and things, and the trouble starts with people like them.
> [male students 21-24]

Similarly,

> I think advertising on the whole is pretty sick. It makes a lot of women very angry and a lot of women very paranoid. I think it does have an effect. People are being brainwashed into being an ideal figure. [female students 18-20]

The two older groups offered particularly detailed and sophisticated analyses of the ways in which advertising portrayed race, family and gender. Students' criticisms of advertising may be in part attributed to their analytical training and environment. It may also be argued that their current lack of spending power gave them some distance from the world of marketing transactions. They were not yet fully implicated in the discourse of advertising, and this may help them make a more detached and critical assessment of its potential effects.

3.1.3. Enjoyment of advertising

We have already seen how students were more likely than others to like ads for products which they disliked or considered irrelevant to them:

> You're not watching it to buy the product, you're watching it for the entertainment.
> [male students 18-20]

While all informants seemed to derive enjoyment from ads, students seemed to find it particularly entertaining. Again, their deferred purchasing power may make the brand-related aspects of advertising less relevant to them, so that many ads were consumed simply for their hedonic value. Indeed, given their current financial constraints, it may even be that students, in classic utilitarian mode, treated advertising as a cheap form of entertainment. In any case, there was a very strong sense of playfulness in their dealings with ads, and they seemed particularly appreciative of the humour and puzzles in advertising:

> The camera angles on his fingers tapping, or like what's it, "People ask me how I feel. It's a series of nerve impulses"...It's like, oh it's so funny. [female students 18-20]

In addition to appreciating the jokes and humour of various ads, students were not slow to find it in less obvious places. They were very adept at making their own fun

from ads, often by making fun of them. Thus, there were heavy doses of irony in many of their comments. They were particularly prone to decoding ads in terms of transparency treatments. Reflecting the gender divisions discussed above, female students were most noticeable in their use of such approaches. Indeed, it was female students who seemed to derive the greatest enjoyment from "awful" ads:

> I used to really like the Martin's Plant Hire advert. I used to love that...It was painfully bad... [female students 21-24]

> That's quite a good advert. It's just so horrible, that's why I like it. [female students 18-20]

> I tend to like adverts that I think are really bad and therefore funny, rather than the ones that are meant to be deliberately funny... [female student 21-24]

These forms of fun seem entirely consistent with students' self-consciousness and analytical approach to advertising, and with their desire to assert their intelligence and control over it.

Finally, students talked more than other informants about incorporating advertising into their social interactions:

> If you're watching TV with somebody it's the only time that provokes a reaction or conversation. Like "see that advert, I hate it", or "I fancy that girl" or "I fancy that boy" or whatever... [female students 21-24]

Indeed, in one of the working groups, which expressed relatively little involvement with advertising, there was some speculation that students would be more likely to talk about advertising:

> - Naebody speaks about advertising. I think if you're a student or something...I suppose if they're maybe doing courses in this...
> - They're stuck in most of the time and maybe like watching telly. [male workers 21-24]

3.2. Workers' experiences of advertising

Presumably workers could more easily afford to buy many advertised products and services than their student or unemployed counterparts. Therefore, they might be expected to approach advertising as "insiders", demonstrating less distance from it than other informants, and a greater sense of its relevance to their lives. To some extent this appeared to be the case. They tended to relate attitudes to ads and brands more than other informants, and to offer more examples of ads "working" on them. Indeed, if they liked or were involved with an ad or ad element, they often expressed some interest in buying the product:

I bought Maxell tapes for years after that. I still do. [female workers 21-24]

- That would make me think of buying Levi's after that.
- That's the most effective advert that I've seen. [male workers 21-24, mixed]

Thus, it seems that they were sometimes willing to offer advertisers who impressed them the reward of their custom. They were also not averse to penalising advertisers such as Radion or Sterling (when they eventually got round to buying furniture) for failing to impress:

I've never seen one of those adverts that would actually make you go and buy that soap powder. It would make me run a mile, I would never buy it. [female workers 18-20]

It may be that responding to advertising in this way was something which other informants could ill afford. While the others occasionally referred to purchasing rewards or penalties, they tended to refer more to hypothetical buying situations, or to comment that ultimately, it was "the cheapest" brand, or the one which had already proved itself, which would be bought.

There were also indications that workers, who were best positioned to approach advertising as potential consumers of goods and services, did not limit their consumption of ads to that role. Thus, they, as much as others, talked of advertising as an entity in its own right, and they were not particularly concerned with its marketing uses and gratifications. Indeed, they discussed its entertainment value more than others, and most references to checking out the opposite sex came from workers.

While television dominated everyone's discussion of advertising, ads in other media appeared to be incorporated into the daily routines of working informants to a greater extent. All references to radio ads were made by workers, as they tended to listen to the radio either while getting ready for work in the morning, or because it was on during the day at work. Many workers also referred to seeing billboards and bus ads as they travelled to and from work each day. Several workers also referred to reading papers or magazines which were lying around at work. Given that they could also afford to go to the cinema and buy magazines more easily than others, it seemed that workers had more opportunity to be exposed to ads across the various media. Certainly, working groups referred to ads in a wider range of media than other groups, although this was not the case in the individual interviews.

Working groups seemed particularly prone to expressing advertising literacy in the role of surrogate strategists. They talked about advertising objectives and market

contexts more than other groups, and they accounted for most discussion of the advertising development process. For example, one worker observed that

> ...a company would have half an idea anyway of what sort of advert they wanted and the advertising people would try and get that out of them to start off with and then...work on their own ideas from the basic idea the company have... [male workers 21-24]

While they did not necessarily attribute their understanding of advertising to direct personal experience or contacts, it may be that their general experience of and exposure to the workings of organisations enabled them, more than others, to offer plausible explanations concerning the logic and process of advertising development. This would be consistent with Morley's (1980, 1986) argument concerning the differential distribution of cultural codes and competencies. However appealing this theory may be, a similar pattern did not emerge in the individual interviews: appreciation of strategic, process and market context issues did not seem to be closely related to occupational status.

Turning to the issue of distance from advertising, working informants seemed less prone to oppositional decodings than others. They expressed less criticism of advertising than students, and in the individual interviews they were also less critical of it than unemployed informants. Workers also appeared the most dismissive of advertising, with many of the comments about the low salience of advertising coming from them. As one informant put it,

> You just watch them if you like them, you know. You dinnae go to bed worrying about them you know. [male workers 18-20]

In this context, it is not surprising that workers also expressed the most scorn for people who complained about advertising, advising them to "get out of your house more", and suggesting that "you just ignore them" or "you've just got to laugh at them". Such dismissiveness offers an interesting contrast to the elitism noticed in many students' comments. It may be that while students felt protected from the persuasive power of advertising by their natural intelligence, workers (who also thought themselves capable of "seeing through" ads) relied more heavily on their sense of consumer sovereignty. Perhaps they believed that their purchasing power and ability to choose gives them the upper hand:

> The thing is...you've always got the power never to go to a loan company. I don't know, I'm in a privileged position where I could quite easily. And if I see something on the telly I don't like, I've always got the power to turn it off. [male workers 21-24, mixed]

3.3. Graduate workers' experiences of advertising

Two groups and two individual interviews were conducted with graduate workers. The graduates interviewed individually appeared to be less critical of advertising than those taking part in the group discussions. Nonetheless, there were certain similarities in their approach to advertising, and many parallels with the student informants, not least in the sense of their own intellectual worth:

> I really hate it when they deliberately choose something new each time to insult your intelligence with. [male graduate workers 21-24]

> I suppose it depends on how easily influenced you are. I suppose the more intelligent you are the less likely to be influenced you are. You've already learned to work it out for yourself sort of thing. [female graduate workers 21-24]

Graduate workers also seemed quite analytical in their approach to advertising. Like the students, they were prepared to debate issues, and to see other points of view. For example, a female graduate was not sure what she thought about the Benetton baby ad, which she had not seen herself but had talked about to others:

> Well, a lot of people liked it because they thought it was like, you know, very natural...but on the other hand it could offend...Oh, I don't know really. I don't know why [children] shouldn't see it, but at the same time I can understand the mother who maybe wouldn't want her child to see something like that. [female graduate worker 21-24]

Indeed, a male graduate talked about having an argument with a friend over the Benetton poster. He went on to suggest that

> ...you can dislike an advert, but at least it creates a change of view or a point of view to discuss. [male graduate worker 21-24]

The graduate groups were particularly prone to playing the role of surrogate strategists, offering many comments on advertising objectives, target markets, positioning and market contexts. Several graduate workers stressed the rational nature of their purchasing decisions and their desire for product information:

> I mean a lot of adverts don't really, they don't really tell you anything about the product, do they? I prefer the more informative adverts. [female graduate workers 21-24]

They also stressed the way in which ads aided choice. For example, another female graduate talked about how little time she had since she had started working, and how she found that looking through cosmetic ads saved her time browsing at make-up counters. Similarly,

...you go "Alright, I'll just get that", rather than have the hassle of looking through everything and thinking "Will I get this, will I get that?" [male graduate worker 21-24]

While they offered many examples of attitudes or involvement related to products, they also considered advertising as a distinct entity, and a source of entertainment and play. As was the case with students, there was a strong sense of them making fun of advertising, and many comments were laced with irony or sarcasm. Indeed, the group which resented the Nationwide ad managed to have some fun at its expense:

- If I wanted to go to Australia or Bali, I'd probably go to Nationwide...
- Actually, that'd be really nice [laughter]: "I'm fed up with my job, I think it's time I expanded my horizons a bit. £3,000?"...
- "I love to walk in the footsteps of older and wiser people" [laughter]
- ..Show me a bank manager in any bank in Britain that's walked in the footsteps of ancient men! [laughter] [male graduate workers 21-24]

The use of irony and sarcasm emerged as an important factor distinguishing this group from its non-graduate counterpart. The non-graduate group did not have a particularly high opinion of advertising, but tended to dismiss it rather than engaging with it: as one member insisted, "nae adverts interest me". Although some advertising-related conversations were reported, it was also in this group that someone maintained that "nobody speaks about advertising". Rather than expressing such indifference, the graduate group seemed to enjoy making raids on the world of advertising: they plundered it for jokes and stories, and appeared to use these to show how silly it all was and how they were not fooled for an instant. For example, ads for Pampers nappies were held up for ridicule:

What about Pampers? "It's dry, look at this": stick a baby down in one, stick it down in terry diapers, then pick it up, and Christ! That one's all wet, this one's all dry. Then they start wearing normal Pampers, the one that's totally dry. Then comes Ultra Pampers, and this one's wet all of a sudden and that one's dry. How the hell do they work that out? [male graduate workers 21-24]

Several other differences emerged between graduate workers and older working informants. Firstly, despite the recognition of other viewpoints, graduates tended to take a more critical stance on advertising. They expressed more concern about its social implications, particularly in terms of stereotyping and the effects on values and lifestyles. They also tended to offer more counterarguments than their non-graduate counterparts, particularly in the groups. Perhaps these differences reflect, in Morley's terms, the graduates' greater access to analytical codes and competencies. Their critical stance may also bear traces of detachment from advertising remaining from their poorer student days.

3.4. Unemployed informants' experiences

Unemployment clearly meant different things to different informants. For example, the older female group seemed to have much more in common with their working counterparts than with many of those who were unemployed. They seemed to treat unemployment as a temporary blip in their working lives, and were optimistic about their future prospects. In the meantime, they enjoyed life as much as they could. For example, one informant, who lived at home, saved money by not going out every Saturday night, but she compensated by treating herself to a bubble bath and a bottle of wine. She still had her car, and someone else in this group mentioned that she owned four pairs of Levi's 501 jeans. They also talked about buying glossy women's magazines.

Of the other unemployed informants, one had never worked, and another had just completed a youth training course. Some had been unemployed for less than six months, others for up to two years. Some lived with their parents, others shared flats, and a few lived in sheltered housing. Some had family problems, experienced eating disorders or severe depression. One had a young child, others intended to go to college in the near future. Thus, it would be unrealistic to expect these young adults' advertising experiences to be similar simply because they were all "unemployed". Some themes emerged from the analysis of their contributions, however, which suggested that for at least some informants, being unemployed coloured their experience of advertising in particular ways.

3.4.1. Lack of purchasing power

While students' experience of advertising seemed to be shaped at least in part by their deferred purchasing power, it was the lack of purchasing power which was noticeable in many unemployed informants' comments. They talked about "fixed budgets" of dole money and occasional "fivers for babysitting".

Lack of money restricted the ways in which they could spend their time. For example, they could not afford to go out for a drink very often, and as one informant put it, when he did go to a pub, he made drinks last a long time and tended "to nurse them, till dust gathers on you". Several people talked about how they passed the time "going up the town and kicking my heels", or "wandering around town". Not surprisingly, there was relatively little cinema-going among these informants, but high levels of awareness concerning the cheapest places and times to visit. Someone

who used to rent two or three videos a week when he was working, now just taped films from television. Another still rented films, but budgeted very carefully for it. While some unemployed informants talked about reading newspapers, this was often related to looking for work, and there was little comment about newspaper advertising.

A sense of financial constraint was evident in many comments about advertising, particularly in the case of the two younger groups. For example, while an older female informant owned four pairs of Levi's, discussion of the Levi's ads came round to the price of the jeans in several groups:

> Because I can't afford it, I thought "What a waste of money that is". I mean, who can afford £40 or £50 a time for a pair of jeans? [unemployed females 18-20]

> I would pick the cheapest ones, I'd never go for Levi's. If they were a tenner I would, I wouldn't splash out. The jeans nowadays are all dear...there's that many people unemployed, people are not going to buy that stuff anymore. [unemployed males 18-20]

3.4.2. "Outsider" perspective

Perhaps because financial constraints prevented them from approaching numerous ads as potential consumers of products, there was a sense that some unemployed informants approached advertising as outsiders. While many demonstrated high levels of advertising literacy, some unemployed informants expressed a certain naivety regarding the workings of the advertising or marketing system, which was not evident in other people's comments. For example, in the younger male group, it was suggested that Radion ads had been developed in cahoots with camcorder manufacturers, and that Tina Turner was paid "about fifty million or a thousand or something" for her appearance in Pepsi ads. It was also in this group that someone thought that cigarette manufacturers should stop advertising and give the savings to the Government who could then cut taxes and make cigarettes cheaper. Another unemployed informant remarked that advertisers

> ...in the short run they maybe have to spend a few thousand pounds for roughly about a minute and a half. [unemployed males 21-24]

Others expressed some uncertainty about what the Scottish electricity privatisation campaign had been about:

> - The two Scottish electricity companies, that one's been on the go for a while now. But it's stopped because they've started whatever they're all doing.
> - Yeah, the shares have started to [pauses] operate. [unemployed females 18-20]

These informants also discussed the logic of targeting:

- It's always the expensive clothes on the telly, I think that should be changed to cheaper clothes for the people who are unemployed because unemployed people can't afford to spend a lot of money on a pair of jeans.
- That would be great but it's the folk with money that pay that's why they do that.

[unemployed females 18-20]

The naivety of some of these comments may be related to unemployed informants' lack of purchasing power: in Morley's terms, it could be argued that having less experience as consumers of goods and services has restricted their access to some of the cultural codes and competencies concerning advertising.

The older female group seemed to derive a great deal of pleasure and entertainment from ads. Among other unemployed informants, there were various instances of this. For example, as we have seen, one of the younger unemployed males was very taken with the Togs nappy ad. Others talked about jokes and games played with ads:

> ...the person I was with bought a point of this Red Rock and then we were sort of mucking about, just reciting bits from the advert. [unemployed male 18-20]

> He's just a great little cartoon cat, and my boyfriend likes him too so we sit and go "Yes, here's the cat!". [unemployed female 21-24]

In general, however, there was less sense of fun and playfulness in unemployed informants' approach to advertising. Indeed, several emphasised its informative uses, and seemed less willing to engage with "pointless" imagery. Thus, someone suggested that, while ads for sales were boring, they were

> ...probably the best kind of adverts. Well, for getting the point across anyway, cos there's nothing else apart from, there's no sort of side gimmick. [unemployed male 18-20]

Similarly, flicking through a magazine, another informant found an ad for a shower featuring a picture of a pig:

> To me, what's wrong, they're talking about showers, so what's the point of not just sticking somebody in having a shower, rather than a picture of a pig? [unemployed female 18-20]

Several explanations may be offered for the relative lack of playfulness in unemployed informants' comments. Firstly, while many young adults expressed wariness with respect to product claims, there was a strong sense among some of the unemployed informants of needing to be on guard against advertising, because they literally could not afford the luxury of being caught out. For example, we saw earlier how someone was unhappy at the way in which a three day sale had been advertised:

They didn't say on the television that you had to pay 5% VAT plus you had to pay 17.5% VAT on top of that as well...they forgot to say that on television and they forgot to advertise it in the newspapers. [unemployed males 21-24]

Similarly,

"The more you wash with Radion, the more it removes dirt and stains"...And it was "The more you wash". And I thought "Well, it doesn't happen first time round, you've got to keep washing and washing with the same product all the time". Basically that's a big con.
[unemployed females 18-20]

Secondly, the images offered in many ads were not ones with which many unemployed informants felt any great affinity. The gap between their level of income and that of the people portrayed in ads did not go unnoticed.

I hate all the Martini adverts as well because they give the idea it's the high life...talking about richness and I don't know, they just seem to use images that are just so far out from life.
[unemployed female 2124]

The coffee ones tend to be like...Gold Blend goes with your bought house...There was one with The [actor from the] Good Life, I think it's Richard Briers. I'm not sure of their names, even the programme was middle class. They speak dead "A, E, I, O, U". Pronounced.
[unemployed males 18-20]

In addition to expressing a sense of personal alienation from particular ads or even types of ads, unemployed informants also criticised advertising at a more general level. While some comments addressed issues of stereotyping, particularly in the individual interviews, others revolved around price and affordability. There was some discussion of advertising's role in encouraging materialism, particularly among those who could not afford it. Thus, it was suggested that ads might depress people, influenced by

...showing them all these sort of ideal situations with people having everything that they need, like. Sort of like microwave ovens, washing machines and all the like. You think it's normal to have them cos everyone on telly's got them. [unemployed male 21-24]

Finally, unemployed informants seemed to be particularly concerned about the hypocrisy of cigarette advertising. Some informants related these ads to their own experience, as they were finding it hard enough to give up smoking which helped to "calm your nerves":

And then you get hit by your doctor, "Oh cut down, give up". But at the same time you've got the opposition saying "buy, buy, buy". [unemployed females 18-20]

It seems like they're advertising something and then having a completely opposite effect in the same advert then, with the health warning underneath...it's like advertising a pair of shoes and then saying at the same time "Don't buy the shoes cos you'll end up with mangled feet"...
[unemployed male 18-20]

3.4.3. "Insider" aspirations

As well as sometimes sensing their exclusion from the world of advertising, unemployed informants expressed a desire to be part of it, as indeed the older female group believed they still were. While there was undoubtedly a material aspect to this, as Grafton Small (1993a) has argued the desire to belong also exists at a social and symbolic level. Cooper (1979) has referred to brands as a badge of membership, and it may be that one of the older unemployed women was at pains to stress her four pairs of Levi's for such reasons. Similarly, another informant, who had discussed the technical accomplishment of a Reebok ad in some detail, mentioned on several occasions that she had recently bought a pair of Reebok trainers:

> Well, the reason I got wasn't - well, I must admit I know the Reebok image, the adverts and everything. It is, I'm familiar with Reebok and I associated them with quality but I got recommended them by an instructor because I had trouble with my knees ... so it was really half and half. I knew I'd heard of them, and I thought "Well, Madonna wears them, she's ace, so I'll get them". [unemployed female 21-24]

Someone else talked about how being able to respond to some ads as a consumer allowed him common ground with others:

> There are some things that come on the television, like new biscuits or something like that. Everybody will try them - if you've got a sweet tooth you'll try it, new bars of chocolate, things like that. You might only try it once, but at least you can say you have tried it and have an opinion on it, whether it was good or it wasn't. [unemployed males 21-24]

Indeed, someone else suggested that

> To be more realistic they should put adverts on for people that can afford it. Think, people are unemployed. Right. They may not be able to afford a £30 pair of jeans but if they put on say Whatties or whatever, a cheap shop, and "we've got jeans at £10.99" then people can go up and buy them. [unemployed females 18-20]

Thus, while she might like to be able to afford a £30 pair of jeans, she seemed more unhappy to be excluded from the advertising dialogue than from the market for more expensive jeans. Similarly, another group suggested that

> - The thing about the coffee adverts is that they're seen as rich adverts, like rich people should only drink coffee.
> - Yeah, middle class, upper class. [unemployed males 18-20]

Once again, it seems that it is the sense, as well as the reality, of being excluded from advertising which these informants found galling.

3.4.4. On the outside looking in: Donna's experience of advertising.

The contributions of one informant in particular highlighted the sense of alienation from advertising which it is possible to experience when unemployed. Donna (not her real name) was 20 years old, and had a 15 month old son. She talked about being "tied to the house", and the problems of "getting up town", having to trudge the baby around on buses. Money was very tight for her; she talked about an advertised bottle of juice costing £2, compared to 67 pence for a big bottle which could be diluted. She went to a particular shop because it advertised cheaper milk, and she started buying TV Quick because it was only ten pence. She liked ads informing her of "good offers", and tried to screen out ads for products she could not afford by pretending she had not seen them. However, this did not always work:

> I'm getting hit with "You can buy this suite at £400 that costs a grand everywhere else". What use is that to people?

She wished ads would give an indication of price, because she was often let down by not being able to afford things when she went to look at them:

> It could be a really simple thing, you think "I'll go and take a wee look". And you build yourself up, the excitement cos you're buying something new or whatever. When you go up and see the price, "What?" You're knocked back for six because you couldn't afford it. And of course you're not getting told on the telly a price range so you make all that effort to go up and look and probably buy it until you see the price of it. That's the thing about advertising.

Even when she could afford an advertised product, she was very suspicious of claims and promises. While she thought that advertisers were honest "to a certain extent", she thought that ads would not tell the whole story, "so you have to check it out yourself". At times her wariness seemed to verge on paranoia. It was Donna who referred to brand endorsers as "getting back-handers", and who was so suspicious of Radion's claim of removing more dirt and stains the more it was used. Similarly,

> They say in the adverts you can bring them back but you're lucky if you get your money back. I'll go into a shop and say to them "If I'm not sure this'll fit him, can I bring it back?" And if they say yes, I say "I want you to write on the back of the receipt that I can return it if it doesn't fit my child".

This wariness seems light years away from the cynicism of students. It was more than her ego which would suffer if she were taken in by an ad, and she could not afford to let her guard down. Indeed, her language at times ("getting hit" by various ads, or "getting Radion right in the face") suggested that she was under attack by advertising. There was also a sense of being besieged in her own home by television ads, particularly by those for products which she could not afford. Tied to the house,

she saw television as her main source of information, whereas those who could afford expensive products could also find out about them in newspapers, or even by shopping around. She suggested that half the time, advertisers would be as well putting new products on a shop's shelf,

> ...and if somebody wants to try it, let them try it. I think it's off about hitting you with adverts on the telly and that.

Rather than seeing expensive products advertised, she wanted to see ads for cheap jeans which she could buy, or information which would be helpful to her, such as details of adult education courses. Her suggestion that some ads could be replaced with programmes of interest to unemployed people may be economically naive, but it relates to something very important to her:

> Even if they gave you an advert on telly, once during the day, saying at this college or at this school you can do bla bla bla. Things that can help people more. To buy you've got to learn, to get a job and afford this sort of stuff.

While she ultimately wanted greater buying power, the phrase "even if they gave you an advert" also seemed to encapsulate the desire of other unemployed informants to be included in the advertising system. So too did her comment that

> The more everyday stuff, like your shopping, paying your bills, you see adverts showing how you can pay your TV licence and that now. They make sense, ones like that, everybody's got the opportunity to do it the easier way.

However, she had a very narrow view of the advertising system. If she were involved with an ad, it tended to be because she was interested in the basic product or special offer. She thought advertising should be factual and informative, that it should, in Levitt's (1970) terms, "celebrate the literal functionality" of products.

> It's just generally what's in the shops, what they're selling. People do need to know about about these things, they are there. But the way they're put across to people, they're just a waste of money and time.

Thus, she preferred ads which showed a product and gave some information about it. While she enjoyed the ad for Anchor butter, she would have preferred to see the product rather than the dancing cows.Similarly,

> For Regal King Size, they've got a big bright red,yellow, green poster and it says "It's the blue you're looking for". And the Regal's a blue and white packet...they could have just a big poster with a packet of fags just the same as Regal King Size. And say "20 Regal King Size", and however much they are. But no, you've got every other colour apart from blue in this picture.

Donna's perspective may be explained in terms of Williams' (1980:185) argument

that people are not materialistic enough, but need advertising to create "magic" (or added value) around the products:

> If we were sensibly materialistic...we should find most advertising to be of insane irrelevance. Beer would be enough for us, without the additional promise that in drinking it we show ourselves to be manly, young atheart or neighbourly...we have a cultural pattern in which the objects are not enough but must be validated, if only in fantasy, by association with social and personal meanings...

For many of us, this "magic" may persuade us that a particular product or brand is more desirable than an otherwise very similar offering. Thus, advertising's "magic" becomes an integral part of the brand, a key criterion in the process of choosing. For Donna, however, it is the other way round: the "magic" is peripheral, superfluous, and it is the actual products, their characteristics and functions which are central to her choice. If she had the money, and saw what she wanted, she would buy it. All she would need to know was that it was there.

There were traces of this perspective in other people's comments, when advertising imagery was described as "obscure", "pointless", or "irrelevant" to a brand. While others could identify with Donna's perspective, however, they did not maintain it so consistently: although they recognised it as a position, they also seemed to have accepted and been implicated in the dominant "magic" system to a greater extent. Thus, they enjoyed many ads and became involved with them. They made fun of their most blatant promises (such as the alchemy of chocolate bars, making women slim, elegant and glamorous), but they were also bored by informative "cardboard cut-out" ads.

One occasion when Donna did get involved with the "magic" was in relation to the Guinness ads. She talked at great length about them, and how she did not understand them; she knew as soon as she saw "the guy with the black jacket and white hair" that they were for Guinness, but she did not understand what they were trying to put over, what they meant about Guinness. In fact, she had read somewhere that "you need the mentality of God knows what age to understand them". She tried to explain what she thought of Rutger Hauer in them - "not weird, but quiet, mysterious, like there was somebody inside that he was wanting to...not let out, but he's not telling anybody". Later, talking about advertising and school, she suggested that it would be good if English classes dealt with advertising:

> Like there's some adverts I don't understand. Although they've got the product there, but what they're trying to say about the product is not really coming over. Just to talk about it, know more about it, an ad that came on. Like Guinness. So I've got more of an idea of what they're trying to put across.

Again, there is a sense of wanting to belong, to share in the understanding of what advertising is about. Given that she did actually seem competent at decoding advertising imagery, however, it seemed that what Donna really did not understand was that artifice and magic is needed to persuade people to buy. If so, she was doubly alientated from advertising. Firstly, she could not afford many of the products advertised on television and sensed that she was being excluded, through a medium which should be more relevant to her needs at that. Secondly, she was alienated from the "magic system", as she could not relate to the way in which even products that she could afford were presented. As one of the practitioners had observed,

> The phenomenon of advertising is based on the premise that we're allowed to have fantasies and that there is some hope of those people realising these fantasies...now a lot of people haven't got a hope in hell of improving their lives. [advertising agency]

Not only does Donna recognise that improving her life would be an uphill struggle, but she could not imagine that fantasies or magic were needed to persuade others to buy when she would buy so readily if she could. If she did understand this, perhaps her sense of alienation would be even greater, because she would recognise exactly how wide the gap is between her own position and that of many others.

4. CONCLUSIONS

Differences in advertising experiences among young adults were found to exist according to their age, gender and occupational status. Thus, older informants appeared to bring their greater experience and consumer socialisation to bear on their relationship with advertising, criticising it more than those in the younger age-group, but enjoying it a great deal as well. Female informants, while more critical of gender portrayals in advertising, had a more playful approach to advertising than their male counterparts.

Students' experience of advertising seemed characterised by their sense of deferred purchasing power and superior analytical ability. They appeared to be relatively detached from and critical of advertising, yet capable of deriving a great deal of enjoyment from it. While graduate workers' experience of advertising seemed

broadly similar to that of students, without the financial constraints, other workers appeared to approach advertising as "insiders" to a much greater extent; they seemed the most implicated in the advertising system, and the least critical of it. In contrast, some unemployed informants seemed to be "outsiders" by virtue of their limited resources and prospects. While they expressed some alienation from and criticism of advertising, they also aspired to be "insiders", in a symbolic as well as material sense.

Differences between informants may well be attributed to their different social positions, or to the different access to cultural codes and competencies which their position provides. However, there are several reasons for avoiding wholehearted acceptance of such a view. Firstly, as both Dyer and Morley have emphasised, how people feel about their social position may influence their readings as much as their "objective" position. In this study, for example, we have seen how the older unemployed female group behaved in many respects like their working counterparts rather than the other unemployed informants. One informant approached one ad as a vegetarian, another as a Robbie Coltrane fan, others as a member of a women's group, and some as the possessor of a business studies qualification: to expect her advertising experiences to fit a mould labelled "unemployed" would be naive as well as insulting.

Secondly, there is a danger that focusing on what divides the young adults in their experience of advertising obscures the great deal which unites them. Across all social groupings, informants demonstrated advertising literacy and involvement, complex and often contradictory attitudes, marketing and non-marketing uses of advertising, and dominant, negotiated and oppositional readings of ads. Even some of the differences noted above serve to emphasise common factors in the young adults' experiences. Thus, we are reminded of the ambivalence of their attitudes, as we see many of them simultaneously criticising and enjoying it. Furthermore, unemployed informants' desire to be part of the world of advertising at a symbolic level emphasises the way in which advertising is woven into the social fabric of all their lives, leading to greater concerns about its implications for those without work than expressed by the Advertising Association (1992).

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

CONCLUSIONS

We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.

T.S. Eliot, "Little Gidding"

Young adults' experiences of advertising were indeed richer and more complex than advertising management textbooks would suggest. This study has provided an "epitheory" of advertising consumption, in that it has integrated previously compartmentalised, incongruent, or unjuxtaposed theories, models, and methods (Mick 1986). The key themes emerging from the study are drawn together in this chapter. Their implications are considered for advertising theory, research and practice, and for public policy. Finally, further research is proposed in order to broaden and deepen our understanding of the relationship between advertising and its audiences.

1. YOUNG ADULTS: POSTMODERN POACHERS OF ADVERTISING

The young adults in this study emerged as extremely competent consumers of advertising, capable of decoding complex visual and verbal imagery, and aware of a range of advertising styles, conventions and trends. Their advertising literacy skills extended beyond the consumer role, however. They were also comfortable and plausible in the role of advertising strategists: their discussion of advertising objectives, market conditions, target markets, positioning and advertising effects approximated conventional industry wisdom, and was frequently expressed in the industry's specialist terms. Finally, they presented themselves as casual cognoscenti, displaying a sensitivity to advertising costs and production values, and offering background stories about the making of particular ads.

Young adults' advertising literacy was closely bound up with their complex and

often contradictory attitudes to ads and advertising. They rewarded those which entertained or intrigued them with close attention, but they avoided ads which they found mundane or patronising. There was also a strong sense of ennui in many of their comments. Much of this seemed related to the repetition of individual ads, but reflecting their understanding of advertising conventions, the young adults were also bored by "predictable" approaches, such as the use of "Brand X" comparisons in washing powder ads.

Their enjoyment of many ads and appreciation of production values seemed to be related to the young adults' willingness to treat advertising as a distinct entity, varying over time and across cultures. At the same time, however, the boundaries between advertising and other communication forms were very fluid for them: their interpretations of ads drew on a wealth of knowledge beyond the world of advertising, just as their experience of other cultural forms was influenced by their encounters with ads.

Advertising literacy also contributed to the young adults' contradictory views on the persuasive powers of advertising. On the one hand, their confidence in the role of surrogate strategist meant that they considered themselves capable of "seeing through" ads and therefore immune to persuasion. On the other hand, they understood that ads were not always intended to have an immediate or discernible effect. This led to a sense of unease with respect to advertising, in case it was influencing them "at the back of your mind". Thus, they were wary of product claims, and sometimes unwilling to take ads at face value (for example by considering something "so bad it has to be professionally done"). This tension between invulnerability and insecurity translated into concerns about the social effects of advertising, combined with a cynicism about the effectiveness of regulation and a reluctance to complain about ads.

In some cases, the young adults expressed consistent attitudes to ads and brands. Indeed, they occasionally seemed to use their purchases as a way of "rewarding" or "punishing" companies for the quality of their ads. More commonly, however, their consumption of ads seemed independent of the brands or products featured. It could be argued that this reflects the research approach rather than young adult behaviour: informants were after all asked to talk about any ads which they remembered, for any reason. This approach certainly did not emphasise purchasing behaviour. Nonetheless, the ads which the young adults remembered and chose to discuss could have been for brands or products which they used. Furthermore, the apparent

independence of ads and brands in the young adults' experience was consistent with many other themes emerging from the data.

For example, the finding that their literacy extended beyond the consumer role indicates that the young adults chose to engage with ads on their own terms and for their own purposes. Similarly, their treatment of advertising as a distinct entity suggests that it had a meaning for them beyond the consumer decision process. This view is supported by findings on advertising involvement, which emerged as a relationship with advertising in general, groups of ads, individual ads or ad elements, along one or more of five dimensions: cognitive, emotional, hedonic, personal experience, and personal values. Given the multiple dimensions and objects of involvement, it is hardly surprising that interest in a product or brand often had little to do with advertising involvement, either as an antecedent or consequence. The antecedents of involvement appeared to exist in the young adults' own lives, in terms of their personal tastes, emotions, beliefs, values and experiences: only some of these related to products or brands. Similarly, while the young adults sometimes referred to brand trial, purchase or loyalty as consequences of advertising involvement, many other consequences seemed more likely. For example, they frequently referred to watching out for an ad or talking about it to others. They also displayed an astonishing recall of the detail in some ads, integrating them with aspects of their own lives, if not necessarily with the featured brand.

Further insight into the independent consumption of ads and brands is provided by considering the uses and gratifications to which the young adults put advertising. Some of these were directly related to marketing transactions, such as added value or product information. Many more did not seem marketing-related, however, and it was these uses which were discussed most commonly and in most detail. Ads were not simply a source of entertainment; they were also used in various levels of social interaction, for example, or as a way of reinforcing or expressing particular attitudes or values. Thus, it seems that the young adults were active, selective and sophisticated consumers of advertising, using it for their own purposes and in their own terms.

Featherstone (1992:1) observes that the term "postmodern" exposes the user to accusations of jumping on the bandwagon of quite a shallow and meaningless intellectual fad. Given that warning, it may seem unwise (especially in a thirteenth chapter) to suggest that young adults' advertising experiences are bound up with the postmodern condition. However, many aspects of their experiences are consistent

with what Brown (1993:21) describes as

> ...the celebration of scepticism, subversiveness, irony, anarchy, playfulness, paradox, style, spectacle, self-referentiality and, above all, by hostility towards generalisations...

Thus, we have seen how playful the young adults often were in their dealings with ads and advertising. They appreciated stylish or spectacular advertising executions, but also found ways of enjoying ads which were neither. Indeed, many of their comments were laced with irony, deriding or subverting advertising claims, executions or conventions. We have also seen how they resented stereotypical advertising portrayals, and how suspicious they were of particular advertising claims and the effects of advertising on them. Finally, we have seen how complex and contradictory their attitudes to advertising often were, and how they recognised the chaos and leakiness of the boundaries between it and other communication forms.

Given this postmodern disposition, their awareness of the "ground rules" of advertising, and their independent consumption of ads and brands, the young adults may be considered postmodern poachers, pursuing the game of advertising. As we saw in Chapter Four, Jenkins (1992) refers to media fans as "textual poachers" who appropriate elements of popular culture and rework them for their own purposes. Jenkins had in turn appropriated the term from de Certeau's writing about literature:

> Far from being writers...readers are travellers; they move across lands belonging to someone else, like nomads poaching their way across fields they did not write, despoiling the wealth of Egypt to enjoy it for themselves. (De Certeau, in Jenkins 1992:24).

While the game of advertising seemed to provide the young adults with a great deal of pleasure, poaching was at times a serious activity. Nava and Nava (1990) wondered whether young people's advertising sophistication may "empower" them to resist advertising messages. In this study, while they made many dominant readings (Hall 1973), young adults did not always accept the advertiser's "definition of the situation". In some cases, they resisted the message itself, or an aspect of it, and in other cases, they resisted the role prescribed for them in relation to the message. For example, negotiated readings occurred when they challenged some aspect of the message while still reacting primarily as consumers, or when they stepped outside that role to comment on an ad as a surrogate strategist. Oppositional readings rejected the advertiser's definition of the situation outright, incorporating the message into an alternative frame of reference. In these cases, the young adults usually swapped the consumer role for that of the concerned critic. In answer to Nava and Nava's question, it appeared that the young adults' advertising literacy

gave them greater opportunity to step outside the consumer role, and to employ a great deal of subtlety, subversiveness and sophistication in resisting advertising messages. There was, however, little sign of global opposition to advertising: the young adults constantly adopted and discarded decoding positions, as each advertising encounter related to their particular tastes, emotions, beliefs, values and experiences as well as their social position.

2. IMPLICATIONS FOR ADVERTISING THEORY

Given the ethnographic nature of this study, the results should be extrapolated to other groups and cultural contexts with care. Nonetheless, this study presents a fuller and richer account of advertising attitudes and involvement, demonstrating that these cannot be considered in isolation, but are interwoven with advertising literacy, uses and gratifications. These in turn are bound up with many other aspects of consumers' lives, and have implications for the ways in which they decode particular ads.

The active, selective and sophisticated nature of the young adults' advertising experiences challenges traditional advertising theory in several respects. Firstly, it undermines positivist models which address narrowly defined aspects of advertising "effects", based on assumptions of passive or at best reactive consumers. As we have seen in Chapters Two and Three, such models have usually been derived from research using artificial ads and brands, controlled conditions and "experimental subjects". In Buttle's (1991:97) terms, they treat consumers as

> ...islands of cognitive and affective responses, unconnected to a social world, detached from culture, removed from history and biography. This is an impoverished model of humanity which can produce only barren theory.

Given the intertextual nature of their advertising experiences, and the holistic nature of their response to ads, young adults' advertising experiences cannot be accounted for by such models. Indeed, the experimental research on which the models are based may be considered a semiotic straightjacket, constraining consumers' ability to express the ways in which they make sense of ads, either in the research laboratory or in their real world advertising encounters.

This study is certainly not the first to present advertising consumers as active and sophisticated, drawing on social and cultural experiences to create and rework advertising meanings. Rather, it supports and extends the analysis of others who

have challenged received wisdom about the relationship between consumers and advertising. Given the concern expressed by Mick and Buhl (1992) that much research on consumers' advertising meanings was theoretical rather than empirical, the contribution of this study lies in its emphasis on "showing" rather than "telling": it offers a "thick description" (Geertz 1973) of how active advertising consumers relate to ads and advertising. It demonstrates how they do this in their own ways, for their own purposes, and with consequences which may or may not relate to economic transactions.

This suggests that those wishing to model advertising effects will need to accommodate the active and sophisticated consumer in some way, to recognise the complexity of consumers' relationship with advertising, and to acknowledge that the advertising-consumer relationship cannot be isolated from its broader social and cultural context.

Furthermore, given the young adults' experience of advertising as an intertextual phenomenon, it seems clear that advertising theory must venture beyond the shadow of managerial marketing frameworks, even if it is to be useful in those terms. Our understanding of advertising consumption can be enriched by appropriating and reworking concepts from fields such as cultural studies. This has previously been demonstrated by Williamson (1978), McCracken (1986), and Grafton-Small and Linstead (1989) among others. The present study shows that there is still much to be gained from such academic bricolage.

3. IMPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCH METHODS

This study raises several issues with respect to how aspects of consumers' advertising experiences may be researched. In the first place, it suggests that the use of students as surrogate consumers is questionable. Students do seem different, even from their peers. Leaving aside the issue of deferred purchasing power, students appear to bring to their encounters with advertising a particularly analytical perspective, and a sense of their own intellectual worth. This is conducive to a greater emphasis on "schemer schema" (Wright 1986) in their responses, which may apply to research projects as well as to ads.

The use of individual interviews in addition to small group discussions was found to

offer several advantages in this study. The individual interviews indicated the diversity of advertising experiences, and emphasised the dangers of generalising: for example, without the individual interviews, it appeared that women did elaborate more on ads than men, and that students were the most concerned about the social effects of advertising. Furthermore, restricting the research to group discussions could have led to the potential level of advertising elaboration and recall being understated. For example, it is doubtful that others would have allowed the young male worker to offer uninterrupted his blow-by-blow account of the Becks ad, complete with running commentary.

While individual interviews often offered more detail than the group discussions, the differences in this respect were not generally dramatic. Individuals in groups also offered detailed or idiosyncratic interprettions of ads: for example, the decoding of the Benson & Hedges "birdcage" ad was offered in a group. It appears that the small groups did provide the benefits of interaction and stimulation without sacrificing a great deal in depth and detail.

Furthermore, given the social context of many advertising experiences, groups may particularly appropriate ways of researching advertising. In this context, the distinction between "showing" and "telling" arises again. For example, many comments in individual interviews reflected a sense of irony or playfulness, and there were numerous references to advertising-related jokes with friends. In the groups, however, the playfulness was also demonstrated in the interactions between the young adults, as they built jokes and games from each others' comments. It could be argued that this reflected group dynamics rather than advertising experiences. It is argued here, however, that advertising facilitated those group dynamics by providing common ground and easing them into relationships with strangers.

4. IMPLICATIONS FOR ADVERTISING PRACTICE

While this study was not primarily intended to assist advertisers in developing more "effective" ads, its findings have several implications for the advertising planning process.

The practitioners interviewed in this study suggested that consumers in general, and young consumers in particular, are "advertising literate". However, practitioners still

appear to underestimate the breadth, depth and sophistication of understanding which consumers may possess, and the extent to which this permeates experiences of advertising. This is perhaps not surprising, as they may wish to preserve their professional mystique, and their sense of power and superiority over those whom they label "the punters".

This study explored young Scottish adults' experience of advertising, and practitioners developing campaigns for other market segments may feel that this study is of little relevance to them. Certainly, it would be unwise to generalise about "the advertising consumer". However, many existing theories do just that, in that they assume a passive or reactive consumer. At the very least, this study has demonstrated that this is not always the case, and practitioners would do well to question that assumption for whatever market they intend to address. It may be that young adults are particularly active and sophisticated consumers of advertising, but other studies indicate that they are not the only active or sophisticated ones. As Lannon (1992) has observed, the existence of the active, reward-seeking consumer has implications for the entire advertising planning process.

The findings of this study suggest that the sophistication and creativity of consumers needs to be matched by sensitive and creative research approaches. For example, if consumers are likely to use ads for a variety of non-marketing purposes, creative development research should incorporate an exploration of advertising uses and gratifications. Furthermore, researchers should acknowledge that their respondents may be very competent, not just as consumers of an ad, but also as surrogate strategists and casual cognoscenti. Group discussions then may need to incorporate such perspectives, rather than denying or supressing them. However, as Ryan (1990) has pointed out, researchers must distinguish between acknowledgement that an ad is aimed at them, and expressions of affinity with it. In other words, the researcher's task is ultimately to facilitate discussion of ads or concepts with consumers in the role of consumers.

Ads themselves may be capable of demanding a great deal from their audience, as long as they also offer rewards. Such an approach has long been implicit in British advertising practice, and this study vindicates it. Indeed, the young adults' sense of playfulness and irony, and the social uses which they have for advertising, suggest that advertisers engaging with consumers on these levels may benefit from considerable word-of-mouth communication. However, in catering for consumers' use of ads for non-marketing purposes, brand relevance should not be sacrificed:

sophisticated consumers know the ground rules, and may have little respect for ads which seem unrelated to the brand. Furthermore, advertisers should respect the history and integrity of a brand's advertising. Consumers may have long advertising memories, and are unlikely to be impressed by a sudden, indiscriminate and undignified scramble for the top of Lannon's (1992) hierarcy of advertising styles. If such a scramble took place, we may expect consumers to identify and dismiss the formula, reserving particular scorn for those "jumping on the bandwaggon".

Advertising evaluation research must also recognise the complexity of consumers' response to and experience of advertising. Indeed, there is as much need for sensitive and creative research approaches during and after a campaign as there is while it is being developed. As Anderson and Myers (1988), Grafton-Small and Linstead (1989) and Buttle (1991) have pointed out, the meaning of a message is not fixed, but constantly reworked as it becomes incorporated into our everyday lives. An exploration of the "semiotic slippage" (Grafton Small 1993) over the course of a campaign should offer useful insights for the development of future campaigns, and for an agency's understanding of consumer culture more broadly.

5. IMPLICATIONS FOR PUBLIC POLICY

The findings of this study have several implications for public policy. Firstly, it may be tempting for advertising regulators to believe that consumers' sophistication makes them less likely to be misled by advertising, and therefore that they need little protection from it. This may indeed be the case, although further research is needed to examine the extent of advertising literacy among other segments of the population. Furthermore, just as advertisers need to match consumers' sophistication with sensitive research approaches, advertising regulators should ensure that their judgements and concerns reflect the subtlety and sophistication of consumers' interpretive skills. For example, it appears that advertisers can expect consumers to make inferences from obscure and complex cues, and regulators must ensure that their judgements address communication at that level. Indeed, if regulators accept the existence of active audiences, it follows that their judgements should focus on how an ad's audiences decode it, rather than on an analysis of the ad in isolation.

Secondly, this study found that advertising was a pervasive presence for young adults. It appeared to be part of the social fabric of their lives, seeping into it from all

directions due to the "leaky boundaries" between it and other cultural forms. While they sometimes approached it as potential consumers of goods and services, they engaged with it for a variety of reasons, many of these having little to do with the possibility of economic transactions. Leiss et al (1990:1) observe that while individual ads may promote goods and services,

> Looked at in depth and as a whole, the ways in which messages are presented in advertising reach deeply into our most serious concerns.

Young adults appear to engage with advertising primarily in social or cultural terms. Therefore, it seems particularly important that they understand how advertising messages may relate to such serious concerns. This becomes even more crucial if we accept Willis's (1990) argument that we are formed most self-consciously through symbolic and other activities in our teenage and early adult years.

Young adults may be well-equipped to deal with advertising at the level of "serious concerns". In this study, they demonstrated a sophisticated understanding of advertising imagery, conventions, styles and trends. They also discussed a wide range of concerns about its social and cultural effects, and many were aware of its role in reinforcing particular values and stereotypes. However, their sense of immunity from advertising at a marketing level may foster similar feelings of invulnerability with respect to advertising's social messages. Certainly, they considered advertising of little importance in the scheme of things. They were cynical about advertising regulations, doubted that advertisers were greatly inconvenienced by them, and had little time for the idea of complaining about an ad to the regulatory bodies (if they knew how to go about this in the first place).

This suggests that the regulatory bodies have much to do to convince young adults of their usefulness and overcome their resistence to the idea of complaining, particularly for reasons other than material self-interest. However, given the self-regulating nature of the British advertising industry, such bodies are unlikely to be proactive in addressing issues of social communication in advertising. It may be that this is where schools could be most useful. Many young adults mentioned learning something about advertising in school. However, it seemed that when their formal education touched on advertising, it was more likely to address students as consumers or strategists than to discuss its broader social and cultural implications.

Thirdly, the relationship between advertising and those who are unemployed needs to be considered. The Advertising Association (1992) dismisses concerns that

unemployed people "find advertising particularly annoying". As we have seen, it is naive, and indeed insulting, to expect unemployed people's experience of advertising to be determined by their employment status: there are many other facets of their lives, and any of these may be most relevant to a particular advertising encounter. Furthermore, unemployement means different things to different people, in objective and subjective terms.

In this study, there were many similarities between the experiences of young adults who were unemployed and their peers: they demonstrated a sophisticated understanding of advertising, they seemed to have complex and contradictory attitudes to it, and it entered the social fabric of their lives in much the same way as that of others. However, among some of the young unemployed adults, there was a sense of being excluded from the world of advertising at both a material and a symbolic level. Ads presented images of middle-class people with comfortable lifestyles and promoted many goods and services beyond their reach. These young adults recognised that ads were aimed at different groups of the population, but rarely at them.

Of course, these young adults' material exclusion from the world of advertising is the fundamental problem, but exclusion at a symbolic level appears to rub salt in the social wound. It is unlikely to be helped by many advertisers of goods and services: they rely on advertising to trade in magic, fantasy and aspirations, and the lack of resources and optimism among many unemployed people will make it more difficult for them to engage with such ads. However, at the very least, unemployed people can be included in the advertising system to some extent if those providing benefits, training and other facilities relevant to their needs communicate with them through advertising, particularly on television. In doing so, however, such organisations should be careful not to add insult to social injury through the crude presentation of ideas, which deny that audience's advertising sophistication.

Finally, it seems that there is potential for research on public policy issues to harness the intertextual and socially situated nature of advertising experiences, at least among young adults. Within the individual interviews and small group discussions, talk about advertising impinged on many aspects of the young adults' lives. Discussion of ads and advertising may facilitate the discussion of a wide range of public policy issues, due to their social uses and the way in which they address (or sometimes fail to address) matters of race, class, gender, and so on.

6. SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This study focused on young adults' advertising experiences because there were indications that these would be particularly rich and complex. We now have a better understanding of young adults' experiences, but we do not know how these compare with the experiences of other groups. As research in other contexts has demonstrated, literacy may be acquired and used in different ways among different social and cultural groups.

The work of Aitken et al (1985, 1988a, 1988b) suggests that 12 year-olds are able to deal with advertising imagery at quite a sophisticated level. We might ask how advertising literacy develops, and whether children learn to perform the different roles at different stages in their development. If we find that competence in the roles of consumers, strategists and cognoscenti develop at different stages, this would provide an opportunity for a detailed study of the ways in which literacy permeates the experience of advertising. Furthermore, given the apparently intertextual nature of advertising experiences, it would be interesting to explore how the "Nintendo generation" relates to advertising. Finally, if children also relate to advertising primarily in social or cultural terms, it would be useful to examine the provision of advertising education in schools, and to learn how, where, and to what extent it is addressed.

Just as research on the development of literacy and its interaction with other aspects of advertising experience would enhance our understanding, it would be useful to examine whether advertising literacy diminishes among older segments of the population, and if it does, in which respects, and to what effect.

It would also be interesting to compare the experience of advertising across cultures as well as across boundaries of age, gender and occupational status. We have seen how a lack of financial resources and prospects may contribute to a sense of alientation from advertising among those who are unemployed. It may be that other groups feel alientated in other ways, and exploration of advertising experiences among different ethnic or subcultural groups may contribute to an understanding of advertising's social and cultural consequences. Furthermore, given the dominance of American theory in advertising, cultural differences between Britain and America, and the way in which the young adults compared British and American ads, a comparison between British and American consumers' experiences may be

illuminating: it may be that the American models do not even represent American experiences of advertising.

Returning to the young adults, it should be remembered that advertising, and consumers' experiences of it, are constantly changing. Thus, this study is already out of date: semiotic slippage is inevitable. It would be interesting to explore how the advertising experiences of those aged 18-24 change over time, as they become established in working or family life, acquiring homes, mortgages, and other responsibilities.

Finally, this study opens the way for a wider range of ethnographic methods in advertising research. Given the social context of many advertising experiences, research among real rather than contrived groups could enhance our understanding: research using groups of families, friends or collegues may yield further insights into the ways in which advertising is integrated into everyday life. As advertising experiences appear to permeate everyday life, it may be that participant observation provides a way forward. Given the problems of participating in the lives of strangers over long periods, it may be useful to recruit members of the groups to be studied as participant observers. They could observe the ways in which advertising featured in the social routines of their everday lives, and note instances of leaky boundaries between advertising and other communication forms. In other words, they could become informants about their culture's experience of advertising in a fuller sense than was possible in this study.

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APPENDIX A

DETAILS OF PRACTITIONER SAMPLE

Participating advertising agencies

Faulds Advertising

Baillie Marshall Ltd.

The Leith Agency

Ash Gupta

Charles Barker Scotland

Participating research companies

System Three Scotland

Hugh Hoffman Research

Market Research Scotland

Scott Porter Research and Marketing Ltd.

APPENDIX B

DETAILS OF PILOT STUDY SAMPLE

Group Discussions

1. **3 female students 18-20:**
   English Literature, Geography, Chemistry

2. **2 male students 18-20:**
   Geography, Law

3. **4 female workers 18-20:**
   Personal Assistant, Pensions Administrator, Receptionist, Secretary

4. **6 male workers (mixed graduates, non-graduates) 21-24:**
   Management Trainee, Apprentice Solicitor, Investment Accountant, three Clerks

Individual Interviews

1. **Female student 18-20, studying English**

2. **Male worker 18-20, technician**

APPENDIX C

DETAILS OF MAIN STUDY SAMPLE

Group Discussions

1. **4 female students 21-24:**
   Languages, Medicine, two Nursing Studies

2. **4 male students 18-20:**
   History, Philosophy, two Law

3. **4 male students 21-24:**
   Engineering, English and History, Law, General Science

4. **4 female students 18-20:**
   Chemistry, Law, Biological Science, Arts

5. **4 femaleworkers 18-20:**
   Typist, Kitchen Assistant, Administrative Assistant, Clerk

6. **4 male graduate workers 21-24:**
   Electronics Engineer, Software Engineer, Park Ranger, Apprentice Solicitor

7. **3 unemployed females 21-24:**
   former Bank Clerk, 9 months unemployed; former Domestic Cleaner, 8 months unemployed; former Nanny, 6 months unemployed

8. **3 male workers 18-20:**
   Clerk, Bank Clerk, Painter

9. **4 unemployed males 18-20:**
   former Assistant Engineer, 4 months unemployed; former local Radio Researcher; 12 months unemployed; former Joiner, 6 months unemployed; former Warehouse Assistant, 6 months unemployed

Group Discussions (Continued)

10. **2 unemployed females 18-20:**
    former Clerk, 2 years unemployed; just completed Youth Training Scheme

11. **4 male workers 21-24:**
    Telephone Engineer, Hairdresser, Printer, Electrician

12. **4 unemployed males 21-24:**
    former "Potboy", 9 months unemployed; former Bartender, 9 months unemployed; former Building Site Labourer, 15 months unemployed; no previous work

13. **4female workers21-24:**
    Hotel Receptionist, Secretary, Clerk, Administrative Assistant

14. **3 female graduate workers 21-24:**
    Secretary, Trainee Accountant, Statistical Information Assistant

Individual Interviews

1. Female worker 18-20, animal technician
2. Unemployed male 21-24, former bartender, 4 months unemployed
3. Male worker 21-24, computer engineer
4. Female student 21-24, Arts
5. Unemployed female 18-20, previously computer programmer
6. Unemployed female 21-24, former sales assistant, 8 months unemployed
7. Female graduate worker 21-24, tourist guide
8. Male worker 18-20, sales assistant
9. Unemployed male 18-20, former glasshouse worker, 5 months unemployed
10. Female student 18-20, Podiatry
11. Male student 18-20, Architecture
12. Male student 21-24, Dentistry
13. Female worker 21-24, auxiliary nurse
14. Male graduate worker 21-24, apprentice solicitor

APPENDIX D

LIST OF TELEVISION ADS IN ACCOMPANYING VIDEO CASSETTE

Running time approximately 35 minutes

Chapter Seven ads:

Galaxy Ripple
Guinness TWINS
Guinness POOL / DARK GLASSES
McEwan's BOULDER
McEwan's ICEBERG
Gold Blend(2 ads)
Sterling
Lucozade
Holsten Pils
Harp
Irn-Bru (2 ads)
Tennent's Special
Radion
Levi's LAUNDRETTE
TV Quick
Tennent's LONDON
Persil
Bisto
McEwan's CHINHEADS
Gordon's Gin (as shown in cinema)
Kellogg's Bran Flakes
L'Egoiste

Chapter Eight ads:

Coke THE KID
Lurpak
Guinness ART
Guinness NIGHTMARE

Chapter Eight ads (Continued):

Flake BATH
Levi's POOLROOM
Heat Electric TORTOISE
Castella (2 ads)
Andrex
Prudential
Greenpeace
1991 Census
Volkswagen
HIV

Chapter Nine ads:

Drink-driving
Heat Electric PARROTS
Togs
Hamlet WORLD CUP
Nationwide Anglia
Red Stripe

Chapter Ten ad:

Martin's Plant Hire

APPENDIX E

Publications based on PhD

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'Towards an understanding of advertising involvement?', in K. Grunert and D. Fulgede (eds), Marketing for Europe - Marketing for the future, Proceedings of the European Marketing Academy Conference, Aarhus: European Marketing Academy, 905-924.

'The uses and gratifications of advertising: an exploratory study', in J. Chias and J. Sureda (eds) Marketing for the new Europe - dealing with complexity, Proceedings of the European Marketing Academy Conference, Barcelona: European Marketing Academy, 1089-1108.

'Advertising uses and gratifications', European Journal of Marketing, special issue on new paradigms in marketing, forthcoming.

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Work in Progress Papers

TOWARDS AN UNDERSTANDING OF ADVERTISING INVOLVEMENT?

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Abstract

The involvement concept seems to have as much potential to confound the study of consumer behaviour as it has to enlighten it. The controversy concerning the nature of involvement and the implications for research are examined. It is argued that the conceptual confusion surrounding involvement in general extends to the specific case of advertising involvement, and that a fresh research approach is needed to enhance understanding of the nature and implications of consumer's involvement with advertising and advertisements.

1 INTRODUCTION

"All changed, changed utterly
A terrible beauty is born"
WB Yeats, "Easter 1916"

These lines should strike a chord in anyone familiar with the diffusion of the involvement concept in marketing theory over the past quarter-century. Few concepts have promised as much, apparently delivered as little, and caused such confusion in the process. Described variously as "the best thing since sliced bread" (Rothschild 1984), "a bag of worms" (Lastovicka and Gardner 1979) and a concept with "a nearly magic meaning in consumer behaviour" (Rajanamieni and Laaksonen 1986), involvement has certainly induced high levels of arousal in academic circles.

This paper will briefly trace the evolution of the involvement concept. It will then focus on the proliferation of definitions and qualifications applied to the construct. Following discussion of three approaches to understanding involvement, the specific case of advertising involvement will be examined. This has received relatively little attention, but appears to suffer from many of the conceptual complications of the general concept. The contribution of Krugman (1965, 1966-67) in this area will be evaluated in some detail, and subsequent treatments of advertising involvement will be discussed.

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The paper will conclude by suggesting a research approach to enhance understanding of the nature and implications of consumers' involvement with advertising.

2 THE NATURE OF INVOLVEMENT

While Smith and Beattie (1984) may have been premature in their view that "the nature and definition of involvement has become more solidified", there seem to be some common starting-points in otherwise disparate analyses of the concept. Thus, involvement is typically characterised as a sense of personal relevance (Howard and Sheth 1969; Zaichkowsky 1985) or a state of arousal (Day 1973; Mitchell 1978; Cohen 1983), with respect to a consumption-related object (such as a brand) or activity (such as purchasing). Involvement increases as an object or activity is more closely tied to an individual's central value system. (Ostrom and Brock 1968; Tyebjee 1979).

Involvement is hypothesised to affect many areas of consumer behaviour, such as brand loyalty, information search and processing behaviour, the diffusion of innovations and opinion leader behaviour, and the size of evoked set in brand choice (Krugman 1965; Summers 1970; Kassarjian 1980; Rothschild 1984; Arora 1985; Kapferer and Laurent 1985; Harris 1987). Indeed, Kassarjian (1980, p 33) suggested that

> "...the simple concept of involvement off-handedly introduced by Krugman some years ago, may well qualify as one of the more important scientific ideas to emerge in consumer research in recent years...the topic should have an impact that will alter many if not most of our conceptions of consumer behaviour models..."

This view of involvement as having wide-ranging consequences is upheld in recent editions of consumer behaviour textbooks. Thus, Wilkie (1990) refers to it as a "major centre of interest", and Engel et al (1990) consider it "of major significance" in explaining and understanding consumer behaviour.

However, in addition to being seen as a promising construct in consumer behaviour, involvement has long been considered problematic. Rothschild and Houston (1977), for example, bemoaned the theoretical lipservice and shallow empirical treatment which it had received. Similarly Mitchell (1978) regretted the lack of a publicly acceptable definition, valid measures and appropriate laboratory manipulations for the concept.

More recently, Rajaniemi and Laaksonen (1986) suggested that it was time to assess the extent to which involvement had actually contributed to an understanding of consumer behaviour. To date, such assessments find it wanting. Conceptual and definitional problems have been found to persist (Assael 1987; Costley 1988; McWilliam 1991), to the extent that Knox and Walker (1990) question the wisdom of using it yet as a basis for the development of marketing strategies.

2.1 Involvement - a mutant construct ?

Some definitional differences relate to the various objects of involvement. For example, consumers may be involved with purchase decisions (Engel et al 1990), products or brands (McWilliam 1991), media or advertising (Krugman 1965, 1967), or television programmes (Krugman 1983; Lloyd and Clancy 1991). While the existence of different objects of involvement is intuitively appealing, Rajaniemi and Laaksonen (1986) observe that the content of involvement definitions has tended to change as the object has changed. If the nature of involvement has indeed been mutated to fit various objects, this explains at least in part why it has been such an elusive concept.

Other distinctions found in the involvement literature do not explicitly refer to different objects of involvement. Thus, distinctions have been made between experienced and expressed involvement (Poiesz and Peters 1987), situational, enduring and response involvement (Houston and Rothschild 1977, 1978), situational, product and enduring involvement (Smith and Beattie 1984), enduring and instrumental involvement (Bloch and Richins 1983), ego involvement, commitment, purchase importance, response involvement and communication involvement (Muncy and Hunt 1984), and cognitive and affective involvement (Vaughn 1980; Park and Young 1986)

On a pragmatic level, Rothschild (1984) complained that the "constant recompartmentalization" of the concept was blocking empirical research. Given such a variety of conceptualisations, however, there seem to be three plausible interpretations of the nature of involvement, which would in turn suggest different priorities for empirical research.

2.2 Three interpretations of involvement.

2.2.1 Involvement as a unitary construct

Firstly, involvement might be a single, unitary construct, whose nature has been mutated and obscured by inconsistent applications in particular situations. If this is the case, efforts should be focused on cleaning the basic, general-purpose construct of its contaminated past, and developing valid, reliable measures of it; this is essentially what Zaichkowsky (1985) attempted with her Personal Involvement Inventory.

This unitary interpretation has been advocated strongly by Mitchell (1978, p 194, 1980), who defines involvement as

> "an individual level, state variable that measures the amount of arousal or interest in a stimulus object or situation".

Cohen (1983) also defines involvement simply as a state of arousal, and argues that to avoid piling "a lot of excess baggage on the term", the state of involvement should be treated separately from its antecedents and consequences. This a particularly useful distinction, and is echoed in Laurent and Kapferer's (1985) criticism of "circular misusage" of the involvement concept, whereby it is defined in terms of its alleged consequences. They equate this with the fallacy of measuring attitudes in terms of behaviour, which prevents any test of theories concerning the behavioural consequences of attitudes. Similarly, Rajaniemi and Laaksonen (1986) reject response-based approaches to the definition of involvement; they argue that involvement is generally accepted to be a mediating variable, and thus cannot logically be defined in terms of response variables.

However, while agreeing with Cohen (1983) on the need to distinguish the state from the consequences of involvement, Rajaniemi and Laaksonen (1986) take issue with individual state definitions such as his. Firstly, they claim that using the term "involvement" in this context simply displaces established, well-developed concepts such as "arousal" or "interest". Secondly, they argue that these approaches generally view involvement as an actualised (rather than latent) state of arousal, affected by all the situational and environmental factors at play in a particular set of circumstances. Thus involvement is presented as a composite mediating variable, incorporating all internal and external determinants of behaviour. This in turn means that none of those determinants are recognised as exerting a direct influence on behaviour, and ironically, that the antecedents cannot be distinguished from the state of involvement itself.

Rajaniemi and Laaksonen's (1986) preference in defining involvement is for a cognitive approach, based broadly on the perceived personal importance of objects or activities. More specifically, this refers to the structural characteristics of an object-related activity: in other words, the strength of an object's linking with a consumer's self-concept, central values and motives. Thus, involvement may be measured in terms of the number and centrality of values, beliefs or benefits included in the attitude. This might suggest that involvement is multidimensional, but the authors point out that involvement is determined by the complexity of the attitude structure, not the attitude structure itself.

Rajaniemi and Laaksonen (1986) claim that defining involvement in this way is helpful for a number of reasons. In limiting the domain of involvement, it offers a view of the construct as a relatively enduring phenomenon, which is one of a number of variables which may influence behaviour, rather than a channel through which all other potential mediators need to pass. Furthermore, they claim that the object and direction of involvement are well specified in such an approach. Thus, with product involvement, they argue that a "situational factor" such as advertising does not affect the level of involvement. However, their reasoning here seems less clear. Firstly, in conceding that an advertisement may affect the level of arousal, which they term situational involvement, they appear to confuse their own parsimonious framework. Secondly, in the case of products or brands which are bought primarily for their symbolic benefits, which are in turn delivered largely by advertising (a brand of lager or perfume for example), it may be that an advertisement could contribute to product involvement.

2.2.2 Involvement as a multidimensional construct

If we adopt the view that involvement is multidimensional, the priority for research is to assess its dimensionality as well as its level. Thus McQuarrie and Munson (1987) adapt Zaichkowsky's (1985) personal involvement inventory to overcome what they see as the weakness of its unidimensional treatment of the concept. Indeed, Zaichkowsky herself (Zaichkowsky 1987) suggests that her inventory needs to be modified to reflect the existence of an emotional as well as a cognitive dimension to involvement.

Lastovicka and Gardner (1979) identified two separate "components" of involvement from an exploratory study using factor analysis of Likert scale items for fourteen product classes. "Normative importance" referred to the strength of the link between a product class and an individual's values. "Brand commitment" was the extent to which an individual was bound to a particular brand choice, and (p 68)

> "...the low-involvement consumer not only thinks of the product class as trivial, but he further has little bond to his brand choice"

This is not particularly helpful, however, as it does not clearly specify the object of involvement. Lastovicka and Gardner (1979) maintain that the relationship between the two components is not hierarchical, so that brand commitment could be high even if a product class is not important; they suggest that this might be the case if brands have high symbolic meaning, are differentiated and publicly purchased or consumed. Is this perhaps an example of the content of involvement mutating to fit the object? Another potential source of confusion here is that a third factor, "familiarity" with a product class, was identified as a component of involvement, but the authors do not elaborate on its relationship with brand commitment and normative importance.

The work of Kapferer and Laurent (1984) and Laurent and Kapferer (1985) may seem to offer more convincing empirical support for an interpretation of involvement as multi-dimensional. Their "involvement profile" was derived from interviews with consumers and advertising managers in addition to a review of the involvement literature. It was used to measure five facets of involvement:

1 the perceived importance of a product
2 perceived risk associated with its purchase, in terms of the perceived severity of negative consequences of poor choice, and

3 the perceived probability of making a poor choice
4 the symbolic or sign value of a product, its use or purchase
5 the hedonic, emotional or pleasure value of a product

The authors administered their involvement profile to a sample of 207 housewives, covering two product categories per respondent and fourteen categories in total. Their analysis suggested that the facets were not independent, and could not fully predict each other. Furthermore, they suggest that the full profile should always be investigated and reported. As Laurent and Kapferer (1985, p 45) report,

> "...no single facet alone catches the richness of the relationship between a consumer and a product class".

Furthermore, different facets of involvement were found to influence various aspects of consumer behaviour in different ways. For example, the pleasure facet influenced respondents' propensity to expose themselves to advertising, but had no influence on the extensiveness of the choice process (this was influenced more by the perceived probability of making a poor choice). This variation of consequences across facets also means that reducing the involvement profile results to a single score in order to predict behaviour would be meaningless.

Thus, Laurent and Kapferer (1985) seem to provide support for the notion of involvement as a multidimensional construct. However, taking Cohen's (1983) distinction on board, they emphasise that their work is concerned with the antecedents of involvement. Furthermore, as Rajaniemi and Laaksonen (1986) point out, they only define involvement in terms of those antecedents, and fail to explain what they understand as the state of involvement. Perhaps we can term this a case of reverse circular misusage!

2.2.3 Involvement or involvements ?

A third possible interpretation is that involvement is neither multidimensional nor a unidimensional concept, but rather a loose collective term for quite disparate mediating variables. Thus, Batra and Raay (1983) argue that product class involvement and message response involvement are two "qualitatively different phenomena". Similarly, Houston and Rothschild (1977, 1978) distinguish between situational, enduring and response involvement, so that the content (and hence measurement approach) is different for each type.

They define situational involvement (SI) as the ability of object-related stimuli (for example a product's price and complexity) to elicit concern from individuals for their behaviour in the context of a particular social psychological situation (for example when "relevant others" are present at the point of purchase or consumption). Somewhat confusingly, the object of SI seems to be a product. Thus the authors describe SI as relating to the consequences component of perceived risk, and maintain that it provides a "between products" perspective on involvement research.

Enduring involvement (EI), according to Houston and Rothschild (1977, 1978), has some similarities with the cognitive approach proposed by Rajaniemi and Laaksonen (1986). EI refers to the strength of a relationship between an individual and an object of concern. This is determined by the strength of an individual's value system relevant to the object, and also by prior experience of the object. EI is expected to be low when an individual has little prior experience of the object; presumably this would be compensated for by high SI, as perceived risk might be greater.

The last category considered by Houston and Rothschild (1977, 1978) is that of response involvement (RI), defined as the complexity of cognitive and behavioural processes characterising the overall consumer decision process. As we have seen earlier, this approach has been rejected in principle by Cohen (1983), Laurent and Kapferer (1985) and Rajaniemi and Laaksonen (1986)

2.3 The prospects for an integrated theory

Contemplating the semantic and conceptual minefields indicated above, one is tempted to agree with Knox and Walker's (1990) pessimistic view that an integrated theory of involvement is not yet within sight, and that managers should be cautious in using involvement theory as a basis for marketing action. However, it may be that an integrated involvement theory is marketing's equivalent of the Holy Grail. While marketers may wish to wait for it to be found, it might be more useful if they invested effort in building the grand theory from the ground up. There are certain parallels with the search for a theory of "how advertising works", and the advice of Stephen King (1975, p 338) in this area might well be applied to research on involvement:

> "What we need is not a wholly comprehensive theory of advertising but a slightly more advanced theory of advertisements. A framework for thinking how different sorts of advertisement might work, for different people, in different circumstances, at different stages in time".

Thus, it might be useful if the marketing community focused research efforts on taking the various conceptualisations of involvement and learning whether particular versions are relevant to particular consumer groups, particular objects, in particular circumstances, at particular stages in time.

3 ADVERTISING INVOLVEMENT

As indicated above, there is agreement within the literature that the object of involvement may be an advertisement. This section of the paper will consider how advertising involvement has been conceptualised. Given concerns that the nature of involvement has not been treated as constant across objects (Rajaniemi and Laaksonen 1986), this exercise allows us to see whether holding the object constant reduces the conceptual confusion. The case of advertising involvement is a particularly interesting one, because the

very notion of involvement was introduced in the context of consumers' response to advertising (Krugman 1965). While the implications of product or situational involvement for advertising response has received considerable attention (Ray 1973, Arora 1985, Park and Young 1986, Petty and Cacioppo 1983, Harris 1987), relatively little consideration has actually been given to understanding the nature or implications of consumers' involvement with advertisements per se.

As Krugman's work (Krugman 1965, 1966-67) has had such a profound influence in this area, it is important to understand what he meant by involvement, the context in which he considered it, and why he considered it important. Therefore the next section will examine his contribution in some detail.

3.1 Krugman's contribution to the theory of advertising involvement

Krugman initially captured the marketing imagination by suggesting that there might be "two entirely different ways of experiencing and being influenced by mass media" (Krugman 1965). One way was characterised by a lack of personal involvement , the other by a high degree of involvement. In using the term "personal involvement", he made it clear that

> "...we do not mean attention, interest or excitement but the number of conscious "bridging experiences", connections, or personal references per minute that the viewer makes between his own life and the stimulus".
>
> (Krugman 1965, p 355)

He argued that the "communication impact" of the mass media would vary with the level of audience involvement:

> "Thus with low involvement one might look for gradual shifts in perceptual structure, aided by repetition, activated by behavioral choice situations, and followed at some time by attitude change. With high involvement one would look for the classic, more dramatic, and more familiar conflict of ideas at the level of conscious opinion and attitude that precedes changes in overt behavior"
>
> (Krugman 1965, p 355)

Some interesting points arise from Krugman's conceptualisation of involvement. Firstly, his definition of involvement can be seen as response-based rather than consistent with individual state approaches; indeed, he explicitly rejects definitions of involvement as "attention, interest or excitement". In Cohen's (1983) terms, then, Krugman defines involvement in terms of its consequences, and is therefore guilty of loading "excess baggage" onto the concept of involvement.

Secondly, Krugman's definition of involvement in terms of "bridging experiences", "connections" and "personal references" could accommodate a wide range of rich and idiosyncratic responses to advertising, both cognitive and affective. However the potential richness is undermined by Krugman's insistence that it is the number of these connections per minute which determines the level of involvement. This seems problematic on two counts. In the first place, undue emphasis appears to be placed on the quantity rather than the quality, or strength of connections. Intuitively, wouldn't we expect an advertisement which "connected" with a fundamental event or value in our lives to be more involving than one with which we could make a number of trivial connections? The recent furore in Britain over the Benetton poster depicting a baby just after the moment of birth (Advertising Standards Authority 1991) would seem to support this. Indeed, as we have seen above, involvement is frequently defined in terms of the linkages between an object and an individual's central value system (Ostrom and Brock 1968, Tyebjee 1979, Rajaniemi and Laaksonen 1986). Thus, a simple count of the number of connections seems misguided.

Secondly, one would expect "connections" to vary not just in strength, but also in dimensionality; again, reducing such variety to a single score would appear to be a crude and counter-productive measure. In this light, it is worth remembering Laurent and Kapferer's (1985) argument that their whole involvement profile had to be considered, because the consequences of involvement depended on its dimensionality as well as its level.

Furthermore, his definition of "connections" in terms of personal references between a stimulus and a viewer's own life may also be restrictive. While he does not explain what he means by connections with "a viewer's own life", examples which he subsequently provides in the case of response to an airline advertisement (Krugman 1966-67) are limited to those such as "It made me think of travelling there myself". If such immediate aspects of a viewer's own life are all Krugman allows as connections, he may be among those advertising researchers who, according to Buttle (1991, p 97)

> "...appear to conceive of individuals as islands of cognitive and affective responses, unconnected to a social world, detached from culture, removed from history and biography."

Leiss, Kline and Jhally (1986), McCracken (1986), and Shimp (1990) have argued, and Williamson (1978) and Grafton-Small and Linstead (1989) have demonstrated, understanding (let alone becoming involved with) an advertisement cannot be explained under such conditions: for advertisers and consumers to create meaning from an advertisement, they both must draw on their reservoirs of social and cultural knowledge. Thus, McCracken (1986, p 74) suggests that

> "Advertising works as a potential method of meaning transfer by bringing the consumer good and a representation of the

culturally constituted world together within the frame of a particular advertisement".

Finally, it is interesting to note that Krugman believed an audience's response to commercial subject matter in the mass media to be generally characterised by a lack of personal involvement. Thus his first paper in this area seems to undermine rather than promote the notion of advertising involvement!

However, his second paper in this field (Krugman 1966-67) dealt explicitly with the concept of advertising involvement. He expressed concern that issues of introspection and subjective experience had generally been obscured in academic research by the "rising tide of behaviorism", and saw his treatment of advertising involvement in terms of "connections" as a means of redressing the imbalance. The definition of advertising involvement offered in this paper was similar to the one discussed above, although he emphasised that only connections made during exposure to the advertisement were relevant.

As we have seen, Krugman had initially suggested that response to advertising in the mass media was likely to be characterised by low involvement. In this second paper, he argued that the level of involvement might depend on the media class employed. Specifically, he argued that low involvement should prevail with television advertising. He reasoned that in this case, it is the stimulus which is animate: the observer is inanimate, and unable to control the pace of the experience or dwell on points within the advertising. Thus, he saw little scope for the television audience making connections with the content of advertisements. With magazines, however, he argued that the stimulus was inanimate, and the observer was animate and in control of pacing the experience, so that there would be ample opportunity for making connections.

He conducted a small-scale laboratory experiment using seventy female respondents to test his hypotheses. He manipulated four variables. The medium was either television or a magazine. He used an airline and margarine brand to manipulate product expensiveness, although this appears to manipulate the much broader variable of perceived risk. Two advertisement editorial environments (serious/news and light/entertainment) were used to manipulate their interest value. Finally, the "instructional set" given to respondents was either editorial ("we're doing a study of magazine/television topics") or advertising ("we're doing a study of magazine/television advertising"). His findings are presented in Table 1.

While he does not comment on the statistical significance of his results, he found that the average number of connections was indeed greater for magazine than for television advertising (interestingly, he did not present his findings in terms of connections per minute). More connections were reported for the more expensive product, and under the more natural editorial instruction set. Comparing these results with those from a subsequent study involving male and female subjects, he suggested that magazines might only be more involving than television for "high-involvement" products. He also offered a tentatitive hypothesis that men make fewer and less favourable connections than women with advertising.

Table 1. Average number of connections per ad

		Magazine	TV
Instructional set:			
	Editorial	1.9	0.75
	Advertising	1.2	0.43
Editorial environment:			
	Serious/news	1.8	0.65
	Light/entertainment	1.3	0.47
Product advertised:			
	Airline	1.8	0.67
	Margarine	1.3	0.56

Source: Krugman, H. 1966-67. The Measurement of Advertising Involvement. Public Opinion Quarterly 30, 583-596

These findings are certainly interesting. However, it should be remembered that his concern was only with the quantity of connections, not their importance to the individual. Presumably more time would be spent dwelling on an important connection, which may in turn prevent other connections from surfacing. Using Krugman's approach, this would effectively reduce an individual's reported involvement level. Furthermore, an indication of an "involving" advertisement might be that people continued to think about it and make connections with it beyond the time of exposure. For example, Preston (1970) suggests that demonstrations in television advertisements may be more likely to elicit connections when they are over. Krugman, however, dismissed any connections occurring after exposure as irrelevant.

It is also worth noting that Krugman's view of the television medium in general is in marked contrast to that advocated by McLuhan (1964, p 36), who distinguished between "hot" and "cool" media:

> "Hot media are...low in participation, and cool media are high in participation or completion by the audience"

McLuhan considered television a "cool" medium, which demanded that the viewer "fill in" gaps in information. Furthermore, he even refers to television as demanding viewer "involvement" - a particularly interesting use of language from our perspective! More recently, television audience research conducted by Morley (1980, 1986) Hobson (1982), Palmer (1986) and Buckingham (1987) refute the notion of a passive television audience; the medium appears to offer, and viewers appear to take, considerable opportunities for making

"connections" between the content of various programmes and the content of their own lives.

While Preston (1970) intuitively agreed with Krugman's "low involvement" view of television advertising and "high involvement" view of magazine advertising, he suggested that this may be attributed to differences in content rather than form between the two media classes. He argued that it was lack of "brand differentiation", rather than inherent media characteristics, which created low involvement with television advertising. His content analysis of 916 television and 1612 magazine advertisements revealed that magazines had more advertisements for "differentiated brands" than television, but a large proportion of magazine advertisements were for undifferentiated brands. On this basis, Preston (1970, pp 293-294) argued that

> "The TV advertising process produces a relatively low involvement due to its concentration of ads which discriminate advertised items only as brands of a given product... The magazine advertising process produces a relatively high involvement due to its relatively greater number of ads which discriminate advertised items as partially distinct products".

Overall, however, he did not consider advertising to operate at a high level of involvement, because it rarely incorporated "real" product discrimination. Preston's view of brand differentiation, then, is a particularly narrow one. It only recognises physical or functional differences between products, and denies any role for branding in adding symbolic value to a product (Allison and Uhl 1964; Cooper 1979; de Chernatony and McWilliam 1989; McWilliam 1991). As advertising is often instrumental in adding this symbolic value (Leiss, Kline and Jhally 1986), it is not surprising that Preston misses the link (which consumers make) between products, brands and advertising. Thus he criticises Krugman for allowing connections about the advertisement in general rather than about the specific advertised brand (Preston 1970, pp 295-323):

> "If the brand is scarcely differentiable from a number of competing brands it will probably be most difficult for the consumer to produce "connections" with that particular brand.

This would be the theoretic expectation under the low-involvement model, yet it might be obscured if the consumer were adept at producing "connections" relating to the general product category or to the ad itself".

What Preston seems to be describing here, however, is a situation where advertising, particularly transformational advertising (Puto and Wells 1984; Percy and Rossiter 1987) can add value to a brand for consumers.

3.2 Other views of advertising involvement

There are a number of other studies explicitly addressing the concept of advertising involvement. However, as we will see, many of the complications and contraditions of the more general involvement construct are evident. Indeed, even within this particular section of its domain, it was impossible to hold the object of involvement constant!

Tyebjee (1979) explains involvement in terms of arousal - this may be physiological, cognitive, attitudinal, interest- or mood-related. He maintains that the concept of involvement in relation to advertising is multidimensional. However in elaborating on this he focuses more on different objects rather than dimensions of involvement. Thus he suggests that involvement with advertising may in fact be involvement with one or more of three aspects:

1 the product or service advertised
2 the sales proposition or key promise of the ad
3 the background copy, or situation/visual elements (including music and non-product related dialogue)

Furthermore, these forms of involvement may interact with involvement with a product, an advertising medium, and a programme or editorial context. Therefore, Tyebjee (1979) stresses the need for research on the interaction of these various forms of involvement, and on their implications for audience segmentation, media and creative decisions, and advertising research itself.

Mitchell (1981), in a paper with the promising title of "The Dimensions of Advertising Involvement" reiterates his definition of involvement as an individual state variable, which varies according to intensity and direction. He then consider the consequences of involvement when its object is a persuasive stimulus. However the conceptual section of his paper seems to actually address the consequences for advertising response of high and low product involvement.

For example, he considers a hypothetical advertisement for a new fuel-efficient car which is shown on a dock surrounded by sailboats. He suggests that someone considering the purchase of such a car would devote full attention to the ad, and activate a memory schema containing information about fuel-efficient cars in order to critically evaluate the information in the ad. This seems to be a case of product involvement mediating response to an advertisement. Another person, more interested in sailing than fuel-efficient cars, however, may be attracted to the ad and pay attention to it, but activate a memory schema relating to sailboats rather than cars. Here, in the absense of involvement with the advertised product, a consumer becomes involved with a non-brand-related element of an ad.

While Krugman's (1966-67) "connections" may relate to just one aspect of an ad, Mitchell (1981), like Tyebjee (1979) appears to expand our

understanding of advertising involvement by making explicit the possibility that an element of the ad, as opposed to the ad as a whole (or the brand or product advertised) may serve as the object of involvement. This is is consistent with the "central" and "peripheral" information-processing approach of Petty et al (1983). However involvement with "peripheral" elements of an ad is presented as occurring only among those who are not highly involved with the advertised product or brand: presumably highly product-involved consumers are so busy processing overtly brand-relevant information that they do not have time to attend to apparently non-brand-relevant elements of an ad.

This is a very problematic view, however. Returning to Mitchell's example of the fuel-efficient car ad, if we assume it has been professionally developed, we would not expect the sailboats to be playing a peripheral role in the ad. Rather, we would expect the juxtaposition of sailboats and car to be intended as a metaphorical device (Williamson 1978), and the target audience to be capable of using that juxtaposition to make inferences about the car.

Thus, the limitations of Mitchell's manipulation of involvement in a previous study (Mitchell 1980) should be clear. He describes his "high involvement" condition as one where individuals devoted all their attention to an advertisement and were instructed to either form an evaluation of the brand or acquire information about it. This suggest some confusion between brand, advertising and task involvement, but it also might be expected to inhibit respondents' use of advertising elements beyond overt arguments about the brand.

Two other studies offer further insight into the dimensions and potential of advertising involvement. Greenwald and Leavitt (1984, 1985), in their brief review of the involvement literature, distinguish between antecedents, consequences and underlying cognitive processes of involvement, and argue that insufficient attention has been paid to the last of these. They define "audience involvement" as

> "the allocation of attentional capacity to a message source, as needed to analyse the message at one of a series of increasingly abstract representational levels"
>
> (Greenwald and Leavitt 1984, p 591).

Specifically, they identify four levels of involvement which are described as "qualitatively different forms of cognitive activity" (Greenwald and Leavitt 1985, p 225). The four levels of processing are presented as preattention, focal attention, comprehension and elaboration. Low levels of processing, such as preattention, use little attentional capacity. As an audience moves up to higher levels, greater capacity is required in order to analyse a message in an increasingly abstract way. Elaboration is the highest level, and goes beyond the absorbtion of information contained within an advertisement. For example, the audience might relate the message to personal goals, imagine events related to the message, or actively support or disagree with some of the message's arguments.

Clearly this view of high involvement can be linked to Krugman's (1965, 1966-67) "connections", and also to Wright's (1973) cognitive response categories of support arguments, counter-arguments and source derogation: in Greenwald and Leavitt's terms, these are activities which would occur under conditions of high involvement with a message. However, their approach focuses only on cognitive processes, ignoring other potential dimensions.

The significance of this last point is highlighted by the work of Batra and Ray (1983). They argue for a definition of involvement in a communication and advertising context which is based on the depth and quality of message-evoked cognitive responses. They contend that message response involvement is situational, coming about with the interaction of a particular person, a particular message and a particular point in time. Furthermore, they suggest that previous categorisations of advertising response are too restrictive, for example, by excluding affective responses (Wright 1973). Therefore, somewhat confusingly, they use the term "cognitive responses" very loosely, and make it clear that they are interested in responses which would have been considered irrelevant in other studies. Their preliminary research in this area (involving written protocols) revealed that affective and "irrelevant" responses were at least as common as those which were strictly cognitive. They suggest that given the richness and multidimensionality of responses which they obtained, commercials "scoring" highly or different dimensions may make competing, but plausible claims to being "involving". This is supported by the later work of Laurent and Kapferer (1985), which suggested that involvement should be measured by a profile rather than a single score, in order to reflect its dimensionality.

Bearing Cohen's (1983) distinction in mind, it should be remembered that Laurent and Kapferer (1985) focus on the <u>antecedents</u> of involvement. Batra and Ray (1983) claim to be concerned with the <u>state</u> of involvement, but as Cohen (1983) points out, they define this in terms of its <u>consequences</u>, as indeed do Greenwald and Leavitt (1985).

4 <u>CONCLUSION: TOWARDS AN UNDERSTANDING OF ADVERTISING INVOLVEMENT?</u>

What, then, do we know about advertising involvement? It emerges as an interesting and complex concept, but there are several areas which require clarification. Firstly, confusion is evident in some studies concerning the <u>object</u> of involvement in an advertising context. Secondly, while it appears that the <u>consequences</u> of advertising involvement are rich and multidimensional, we have little to guide us in understanding what we could mean by the <u>state</u> of advertising involvement. Thirdly, the <u>antecedents</u> of advertising involvement merit some attention, and finally, the implications of advertising involvement for the development of advertising campaigns need to be considered.

It is interesting to note that only two studies (Laurent and Kapferer 1984, also reported in Kapferer and Laurent 1985, and Batra and Ray 1983) used interviews with consumers and/or practitioners in

generating ideas about the nature of involvement; most theory generation has been conceptual rather than empirical. This has resulted in considerable confusion in the vast literature on involvement in general, and the confusion is reflected in the less extensive treatment of the advertising involvement construct.

Just as building theory from the ground up was suggested as the way forward for involvement research, the same can be said for the study of advertising involvement. Before it too is engulfed in a sea of contradictory conceptualisations, it is suggested that a grounded theory approach (Glaser and Strauss 1967) is taken to the generation of theories concerning the nature and implications of advertising involvement. This would involve obtaining advertising consumers' "definition of the situation" (Thomas 1949): their understanding of the relationship which they have with advertising in general and advertisements in particular, and the context in which this relationship exists.

The work of Williamson (1978), Grafton-Small and Linstead (1989), and Buttle (1990) indicates that such relationships are complex and dynamic. Furthermore, the experience of British advertising research practitioners suggests that consumers are certainly capable of contemplating and articulating those relationships. Meadows (1983) refers to consumers of advertising as "advertising literate", for example, while Setford (1990) refers to the "ad-fluent society". At the very least, given the current confusion surrounding the nature of involvement (advertising or otherwise), it seems that asking consumers to share in the development of theory can be no more dangerous than excluding them from such activities!

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THE USES AND GRATIFICATIONS OF ADVERTISING: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY

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1. INTRODUCTION

There is growing recognition of consumers' advertising sophistication and the complexity of the relationship between advertisements and their audience. In this context, various practitioners and academics have argued that research should address what consumers do with advertising, rather than what advertising does to them. In developing our understanding of such issues, a uses and gratifications approach to the study of advertising may be helpful.

According to uses and gratifications theory, the mass media constitute a resource which audiences draw upon to satisfy various needs. In its conception of an active, goal-directed audience, it is consistent with emerging views of the advertising consumer. However, there has been little application of this approach to the study of advertising, either in theoretical or empirical terms.

This paper provides an overview of the litera ure in this area. It then offers a classification of advertising uses and gratifications derived from a qualitative study. Finally, it assesses the implications of such an approach for the theory and practice of advertising and offers suggestions for further research.

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2.1. Origins and basic principles

A uses and gratifications approach to the study of communication was first formally outlined by Katz (1959). He suggested that communication research should reverse the traditional question of what the media do to people, and ask instead what people do with the media. This formulation was not entirely original, however. It was rooted in a research stream which emerged in the 1940's as an antidote to the "magic bullet" approach advocated by the Frankfurt School since the turn of the century.

The Frankfurt School's view of the media as exerting powerful and direct influence on individuals' behaviour and beliefs had been undermined by findings on selective perception, individual differences and social processes. Taken together, these research strands indicated that audiences were active in their selection of content and messages from the mass media. In the 1940's, numerous studies examined the way in which audiences used various media and genres such as classical radio music, radio soap operas, and daily newspapers (Barratt 1990; DeFleur and Ball-Rokeach 1989; Severin and Tankard 1988).

Katz et al (1973, 1974) outline the basic assumptions of a uses and gratifications approach. Firstly, the audience is active, and thus much mass media use is goal-directed. Secondly, the initiative in linking need gratification with media choice lies largely with the audience member. Thirdly, the media compete with other sources of need satisfaction. Finally, the gratifications sought from the media include diversion and entertainment as well as information, and these will vary according to the social roles and psychological disposition of individual audience members.

2.2. Classifications

Several classifications of mass media uses have been proposed. Lasswell (1948) suggested that they facilitated the transmission of social heritage, surveillance of the environment, and correlation, or selection and interpretation of information. In adding entertainment to the uses of the mass media, Wright (1959) anticipated a category which was to assume great importance in other typologies. For example, Stephenson (1967) emphasised the opportunities for play and pleasure, while McQuail et al (1972) noted that escapism appeared to be the most common motivation attributed to users of the mass media.

Schramm et al (1961) referred to deferred/reality and immediate/fantasy rewards, and Weiss (1971) suggested that the mass media may satisfy informational-educational and fantasist-escapist needs. These resemble the surveillance and diversion categories offered by McQuail et al (1972). However, these authors also suggested that the mass media may satisfy needs relating to personal identity and relationships. Similarly, Katz et al (1973) proposed that mass media needs may be cognitive, affective, or both, and oriented towards an individual's sense of self or the social environment.

More recently, Lull (1980, 1990) proposed a comprehensive framework for assessing the social uses of the mass media. He suggested that these may be structural or relational. Structural uses could be environmental (providing background noise, companionship, or entertainment) or regulative (structuring time, activity or talk). Relational uses were fourfold. Firstly, the mass media could facilitate communication. Secondly, they provide opportunities for interpersonal affiliation or avoidance. Thirdly, they offer opportunities for social learning, and finally, they allow individuals to demonstrate their competence or dominance.

2.3. Criticisms

The uses and gratifications research tradition has been challenged on various grounds. Firstly, while it assumes that the audience is active and in control, Lometti et al (1977) argue that uses and gratifications are mediators of rather than substitutes for media effects, and Barratt (1990) questions the view that there are no "hidden messages" in media content.

Secondly, some analysts have doubted the validity of self-reports on the uses sought or gratifications obtained from the media. They argue that such an approach is too simplistic, particularly in light of the complexity of human motivation (McLeod and Becker 1981; Severin and Tankard 1988).

The means of obtaining these self-reports have also been questioned. Many studies have only used multiple-choice questionnaires based on uses and gratifications defined a priori by researchers. While Lometti et al (1977) criticise such approaches, they suggest that in-depth interviews also have problems, in that respondents may wish to appear more rational than they actually are. This is not consistent with the range of fantasy, play and escape uses identified in studies incorporating qualitative elements conducted by McQuail et al (1972). However, Becker (1979) found some respondents were unable to specify the gratifications got from media use when asked open-ended questions, although they readily identified them from a list of alternatives. Given these concerns, perhaps the ethnographic approach used by Lull (1980, 1990) suggests a way forward. He based his classification on participant observation and semi-structured interviews with various household members.

Concern has also been expressed about the limited scope of uses and gratification research. Palmgreen et al (1981) argue that there is still much to learn about the relationship between gratifications sought and obtained, the antecedents of such gratifications, and the ways in which they relate to media behaviour. Similarly, McLeod and Becker (1981) advocate broader, more systematic and complex models of uses and gratifications. They, and others such as Morley (1980) and Barratt (1990) criticise the focus on common needs, rather than on the different uses to which various social groups may put the media. Morley (1980) has called for research linking different patterns of gratifications sought with meanings and interpretations given to specific media messages. In his own work on differing interpretations of a particular television programme (Morley 1980), and the family television viewing experience (Morley 1986), he demonstrates the promise of such an approach.

More fundamentally, uses and gratifications research has been criticised for being vague and nontheoretical. It has been accused of simply restating some aspects of selective influence theories, and offering little more than a data collection strategy and lists of reasons why people attend to the mass media. (DeFleur and Ball-Rokeach 1989; Severin and Tankard 1988).

Taken together, these criticisms may indicate that research in this tradition is methodologically flawed and theoretically redundant. However, Severin and Tankard (1988) argue that it is valuable even as an antidote to the emphasis elsewhere on the persuasion of passive audiences. Indeed, it could be argued that it has yet to achieve its potential. As we have seen, McLeod and Becker (1981) and Palmgreen et al (1981) have argued for more comprehensive and theoretically integrated models, and Morley (1980, 1986) and Lull (1990) offer some guidance on the use of more sensitive research methods.

2.4. Advertising applications

There is at least a quarter-century of implicit support among British advertising practitioners for a uses and gratifications approach to the study of advertising. Joyce (1967) insisted that "the consumer is not passive, helpless advertising fodder", while Hedges (1974) suggested that it might be more useful to think less about what advertising does to people, and more about what people do with advertising. Similarly, McDonald (1980) decried the "myth of causality" which implied that each ad had its own electric charge to be "transmitted to its victim on impact". He argued that the consumer is not passive, but rather chooses to pay attention, and that an ad's only value is that which the consumer gives it. Similarly, Meadows (1983) talked about active, sophisticated "consumers of advertising", and Lannon (1985) observed that consumers expect advertising to provide aesthetic, emotional or intellectual rewards.

However, it appears that many practitioners and researchers have not accepted the implications of such a perspective: Lannon (1992, p 16) still finds herself having to argue the case for a "new model" to inform the development and evaluation of advertising.

> ...because the common strand running through the entire process starts from the same basis, the question of what do people do with advertising: how do they use it? And what do they use it for?

Thus, various prominent practitioners believe that consumers of advertising are active and seek various rewards from their encounters with advertisements. While it is plausible that some of these rewards are similar to the classifications discussed above for the mass media in general, little work has explicitly addressed the uses and gratifications of advertising.

Crosier (1983) suggests that we consume advertising for at least four kinds of satisfactions, namely product information, entertainment, implied warranty and value addition. Using the suggestions of May (1983), he adds three more to his list: post-purchase reassurance, vicarious experience, and involvement. Vicarious experience is the opportunity to experience situations or lifestyles to which we would otherwise have no access. Involvement refers to the pleasure of participation in the puzzles or jokes offered by some advertisements.

Buttle (1991) reviews various studies on the role of television advertising in interpersonal communication, and found a limited role in generating conversation. Children however sometimes used it to initiate or influence interaction with family members, or for ideas for play.

Some further insights were provided by Willis (1990), who conducted an ethnographic study concerning young adults' meanings and interpretations of popular cultural forms. While the focus of this study was on music, fashion and the media in general, there is some mention of advertising. He argues that young people are adept at, and enjoy decoding complex messages, jokes and cross-references. He also suggests that they use ads as "tokens" in social exchanges, and consume them independently of the advertised product.

Thus, as a part of the mass media, advertising may offer its audience various uses and gratifications. Some of these (information, entertainment, reassurance, and added value) may be related directly to marketing or objectives. Others, such as personal identity, social relationships and vicarious experience may or may not be related to these objectives.

3. THE PRESENT STUDY

The classification of advertising uses and gratifications presented and discussed below is derived from a broader study of young people's experience of advertising as part of their everyday lives.

This project focused on the relationship between 18-24 year-olds and advertising. Several studies have credited this group with a particularly sophisticated understanding of advertising (Gordon 1984; Willis 1990). Therefore, we might expect this relationship to be especially interesting, and perhaps of broader significance: Davis (1990) has pointed out that cultural changes originating with this age-group often find their way into mainstream adult culture. This group also represents a lucrative but shrinking market segment in Britain, so that offerings aimed at them (including advertising) must be extremely well-targeted (Mintel 1990). Finally, as this particular cohort grows, it will become the target audience for an ever wider range of advertised goods and services.

A qualitative approach, based on grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss 1967) was adopted in this study. Burns (1989) describes qualitative research as "experiencing the experiences of others". This was very much the intention here, and respondents were encouraged to describe their experience of advertising in their own words, in their own way, and with their own examples. In this context, it would have been inappropriate for the researcher to impose a set of ads. Therefore, discussions began with respondents describing ads which they liked, disliked or remembered for any reason, and from any time or medium. Thus, subsequent discussion of respondents' attitudes, interpretations and uses of advertising emerged from, and built upon, their own experience and descriptions of advertisements.

The study used both small-group discussions and individual interviews. Small groups (usually involving four participants) were used for the benefits of social interaction and idea stimulation (Tynan and Drayton 1986), combined with the potential for exploring individual comments and interpretations in more detail than large groups allow (Robson 1989). Individual interviews were used to allow more detailed exploration of individual experiences, interpretations and idiosyncrasies (Burns 1989).

A pilot study involved four small group discussions and two individual interviews. The main phase of the research was conducted in Edinburgh between May and July 1992. It involved fourteen groups and fourteen individual interviews, organised by a professional recruiter. In total, eighty two respondents participated in the project, and discussions generally took between an hour and a half and two hours.

In order to explore differential patterns of use and interpretation (Morley 1980; McLeod and Becker 1981), age, gender and occupational status quotas were used. Given the difficulties of measuring occupational status in this age-group (Francis 1982; Furnham and Gunter 1989), respondents were simply classified as unemployed, students or workers. For the older groups, the working category was divided into graduate and non-graduate. It was thought that this would provide some approximation of current buying power and future prospects, both of which may help to shape an individual's use and interpretation of advertisements.

The classification presented below is based on a constant comparative analysis (Glaser and Strauss 1967) of transcripts from the eighteen group discussions. A wide range of uses for advertising emerged from these. Some uses may be seen as directly facilitating marketing transactions, while others have little to do with this aspect of respondents' lives. In making the distinction between marketing and non-marketing uses below, however, the focus is on the uses to which consumers, rather than advertisers, put advertising. For example, entertainment, which may be intended by the advertiser to gain attention, is considered here as a non-marketing use.

4. MARKETING USES OF ADVERTISING

Respondents generally talked about advertising as providing information about products, thereby facilitating choice, convenience and competition. There were also suggestions that it provided reassurance and stimulated consumption-related aspirations.

4.1. Information

Advertising was seen as a source of information, primarily on availability and price. An example used by several respondents was looking for a new CD player, where they would look at advertisements to find out more about them and to see if there were any sales on. However, they were aware of the limitations of advertising in providing information:

> A lot of adverts...don't really tell you anything about the product, do they? It's just a story. I prefer the more informative adverts. (female graduate worker, 21-24)

There seemed to be little expectation that advertising would tell consumers much about actual product features. Thus, a male student remarked in mild amazement that a particular ad "actually provides you with some information about the car". Another respondent was extremely cynical about the value of information provided in ads for toiletries:

> ...they talk about complex biological structures...You just want to wash your hair, you don't want triple DNA combinations. I mean it just means absolutely nothing.
> (female graduate worker, 21-24)

One area of particular interest to respondents was information about new products. While some questioned the need for established brands to advertise, they "could understand it if it was new products that were coming out". Even the generally despised washing powder ads were tolerated "if it's something new".

It may be that this concern with newness is simply a reflection of the overwhelming sense of tedium and boredom which repeated exposure to the same ads may create. In this case the newness of the product may offer diversion similar to a new advertising execution. However, their enthusiasm for new product ads seems to extend beyond this into the realm of surveillance. Asked if they would miss advertising if it were to disappear altogether, respondents were consistently concerned that they would lose out:

> I think I'd certainly miss it because how would you find out about new things?
> (female student, 21-24)

> You wouldn't like to miss out on anything like an amazing new breakfast cereal that they're making!
> (female graduate worker, 21-24)

Overall, then, advertising was thought to provide information on the existence of new products, and the price and availability of more established (and usually expensive) products. In a minority of cases, however, the information sought or obtained from advertising went beyond this. Thus, a drink-driving ad was described as "good informative advertising - the more you see it, the more you maybe think about it", and in one of the unemployed groups, a desire was expressed for ads which provided information on sports or training opportunities, or simply things to do outside the house.

4.2. Choice, competition and convenience

Advertising was thought to facilitate choice in two ways. Firstly, it stimulated competition, providing people with more alternatives, and secondly, it told people about those alternatives. Without advertising,

> You wouldn't hear about any new products and there would be less competition. So you would have just the one product, not having a huge choice because you haven't really heard of things.
> (female student 18-20)

A male student talked about the horrors of going to the supermarket and being faced with six bottles of washing-up liquid and not knowing which one to pick. He thought that "even just an advert can help you to choose, just to decide, to pick something".

Thus, respondents did not seem to question the ideology of the marketplace and advertising's role within it. In this last example, advertising is seen as an aid to choice, but there is no questioning of the value of choice when the six options are so similar that "even just an advert" can make the difference.

In another group, the idea of choice was related to convenience, in that more time would have to be spent in the supermarket to decide on what to buy. This group suggested that even if advertising in its current forms were to disappear, other ways of drawing people's attention to products would be found, such as "speaking cornflake boxes".

4.3. Quality assurance and reassurance

As Crosier (1983) suggests, advertising can be used as an implied warranty, in that a company which advertises its brands is seen to stand behind them. Thus, a student talked about his sense of unease after buying a music system which was not advertised, although he had sought expert advice. Even with less risky purchases, there was still some concern:

> If a brand stopped advertising you'd think, where are the adverts? It must be going really downhill.
> (male student 18-20)

4.4. Consumption stimulation

There was some recognition that advertising could stimulate consumption, though not necessarily of the actual product being advertised. One respondent, while having no interest in furniture ads, recognised that when she was older and had a home to furnish, she might be stimulated by an ad to think about buying something similar. Others suggested that they might buy, say, a white T-shirt from looking at the way the actors in a Coke ad were dressed. In another group, sales of gold coffee-bean jewellry were attributed to the Nescafe Gold Blend ads.

4.5. Added value

According to Willis (1990, p 7), it is during our teenage and early adult years that we are formed most self-consciously through our symbolic and other activities. We may expect advertising to play an important role in this, as it often deals in images of self-identity and social relationships (Williamson 1978; Leiss et al 1990). In some cases, particularly where advertising develops brand image and personality (Aaker et al 1992), it may add value by enhancing self-image. Thus, one respondent suggested that several of her male friends drank Guinness to be cool like Rutger Hauer, the actor featured in the Guinness ads. Similarly, there was some discussion in one of the male working groups about the merits of Levi's jeans compared to two retailer brands. Levi's, though advertising, had established a premium image so that

> If you got 501's you were THE person. You bought 501's and that was it.

> When you go down to the pub on a Saturday night and everyone's buying Holsten, if you've got a pair of C & A's you feel, oh... [laughter]

> ...They're quite homey, middle of the road, you put them on, that's it [Marks & Spencer's jeans]. Levi's, you've definitely got a trendy pair of jeans, quite smart, a bit special.
> (male workers, 21-24)

4.6. Vicarious consumption

One respondent mentioned that she liked buying Vogue and Tatler magazines, which were "just purely adverts".

> I'm only interested in looking at the adverts for the clothes and thejewellry, and it's always like Van Clees and Arpels jewellry and something like that. (female worker 21-24)

Crosier (1983) suggested that consumers may use advertising to gain vicarious access to experiences and lifestyles which would otherwise be beyond their means. As this respondent also spent an hour "going around looking at everything" in the jewellry department at Harrods on a recent trip to London, she seems to be seeking out vicarious consumption experiences. Such experiences may serve two purposes. They may be a form of escapism, if people do not expect to be able to afford them. Alternatively, they may be used as a form of consumer socialisation, fuelling and focusing aspirations. In this case, where the respondent seemed particularly ambitious and confident, it is almost inconceivable that she could enjoy her vicarious consumption of the jewellry if she suspected it was a substitute rather than a rehearsal for actual ownership.

Among the unemployed groups, there was no evidence of advertising being used for vicarious consumption in either form. In fact, for the group which expressed the least hope for the future, ads for products beyond their means seemed almost unbearable, to the extent that one respondent would pretend to herself that she had not seen the ads.

- Suites, carpets, curtains, that's the kind of adverts you get now, which I just don't pay any attention to because I don't have the money to buy them, so what's the point of listening to them?
- Ken, switch off while you're watching. (unemployed females, 18-20)

5. NON-MARKETING USES OF ADVERTISING

In addition to using ads for purposes related to marketing transactions, respondents seemed to obtain many other gratifications from advertising.

5.1. Structuring time

Lull (1980, 1990) described how television programmes may be used to structure or "punctuate" time. Certainly television advertising seems to perform this function particularly well. For the respondents in this study, commercial breaks offered at the very least, an opportunity to leave the room to put the kettle on, go to the toilet or even make short telephone calls. While there were several complaints about breaks which spoiled good films or football matches, a number of respondents actually complained about watching films on non-commercial stations, because "you have to sit down and watch these films for hours on end".

5.2. Diversion

Advertising was also thought to offer some diversionary benefits. It "broke up the text" in magazines, it made life richer and more colourful, it was something to look at when travelling on a bus, and "a break when there's nothing on TV and you're just sort of sitting there".

Such benefits may be offered by advertising in general, but there were some indications that particular ads were used for diversionary purposes. Thus one ad was described as "a break from your boring ads". This may even partly explain the attraction of some particularly low-budget ads which were generally accepted as "awful". As one respondent observed, "most adverts are slick". Perhaps the decidedly unslick minority offer a welcome diversion from the mundane professionalism of the majority!

5.3. Entertainment

The American copywriter Robert Fine maintained that "entertainment is sort of repayment" to the audience for allowing advertisements to interrupt the editorial material and "push their way uninvited into somebody's mind" (Aaker et al 1992, p 389). Audiences certainly seem to welcome such payment. According to advertising researchers, many consumers say that the ads are often better than the television programmes. In this study, the entertainment value of television ads were frequently discussed in relation to the programmes. In a few cases, the relationship between the two was seen as economic, in that advertising funded commercial stations:

> The only thing I would agree with television advertising is it pays for the television company...I'd rather have adverts on BBC rather than pay money to them for a TV licence.
> (male worker, 21-24)

This view of television advertising as a "necessary evil" was not generally held. One respondent mentioned that he had read somewhere that "more kids preferred adverts than the actual TV". Several described some ads as "like wee programmes", while many others thought the ads were "better" or "more interesting" than the programmes, worth watching for "the enjoyment" or "a good laugh". Particular sources of entertainment were music, humour, interesting ideas or visuals, attractive actors (usually of the opposite sex!), and "wee stories". The Nescafe Gold Blend ads, for example, were often compared to television mini-series, with interest expressed in the couple's relationship, what would happen next, and so on. The relationship between the story and the brand was sometimes problematic however: the Gold Blend ads were criticised for having no relationship to the coffee, while in the case of a Flake ad, the brand intruded into a good story:

> You do get frustrated waiting for her to pick up the phone. You want to know who's at the other end, waiting for her, and she's eating her Flake!
> (female worker, 18-20)

Overall then, it was clear from the groups that they used advertising as a form of entertainment in its own right, and many examples were given to illustrate this. One respondent suggested that this was not surprising:

> There's an element of popular culture wrapped up in this. I mean people think it's fun, it interrupts your telly, it's quite amusing...
> (male graduate worker 21-24)

5.4. Familiarity

Respondents seemed to welcome advertising for its reflection of familiar, everyday aspects of their own lives. For example, they liked recognising places in ads, and were pleased when ads used sets which were similar to their own homes. One student particularly liked a series of ads because they reminded her of the way older members of her own family behaved.

This may be related to Krugman's description of involvement in terms of "connections" between the content of a persuasive stimulus and the content of the viewer's own life (Krugman 1965). This does not however explain what use such connections may be to an ad's audience in general or these respondents in particular. Perhaps seeing aspects of their own lives absorbed and played back to them by advertising, which generally depicts a world of desirability, provides legitimation and reassurance that their lives are not so much less attractive than others.

5.5. Escapism

There were some indications that ads also offered some benefits relating to fantasy or escapism. An unemployed respondent described the glorious sunshine on the deserted island of the Bounty ads as "pure escapism", for example, and another suggested that

> You don't want to watch down to earth adverts, you want something pretend, some fantasy.
> (unemployed male, 21-24)

Similarly, commenting on one of the Levi's ads, a student said

> You want someone to come driving through your office on a motorbike, get undressed under the table. Quite nice to think about.
> (female student 18-20)

Her identification with this situation was particularly interesting as she was a first-year student. For her, it was almost a double fantasy as she had no experience of full-time employment, let alone a knight in shining armour to take her away from it! In general, however, there was little explicit mention of using ads as a form of escapism, or of Crosier's (1983) "vicarious experiences". Perhaps advertising was less a source of heady fantasy, and more a form of mild escapism through its offerings of "wee stories" and entertainment, and the opportunities it provided for play.

5.6. Play

Willis (1990, p 1) argues that

> ...there is a vibrant symbolic life and symbolic creativity in everyday life, everyday activity and expression...Most young people's lives are ...full of expressions, signs and symbols through which [they seek] to establish their presence, identity and meaning.

Similarly, Grafton-Small and Linstead (1989) discuss the great sophistication displayed by "creative consumers" in their everyday understanding of ads, and Cook (1992), writing from a linguistics perspective, suggests that advertising may fulfil a need for language play.
The creativity and "vibrant symbolic life" of respondents in this study was certainly visible in their relations with advertising. They played with advertising in the course of the discussions, frequently acting out scenes from ads, trying on, discarding and making fun of various roles, characters, lines, and accents. Many characters were given walk-on parts in the course of the discussions, from Macbeth's witches, manipulative advertising executives and unloved traffic wardens, to celebrity endorsers, injured footballers, and turtles waxing lyrical about controlled heating systems.

Phrases from ads were incorporated into their everyday activities to particular effect:

> One of my friends uses the catchline all the time, the catchphrase and it makes me laugh.
> (female student, 18-20)

Respondents described how they sang along with their favourite (or most hated) jingles, and in several cases they performed them for the group. For example, a male graduate astounded his group with his rendition of the lyrics from the Irn-Bru ad, which made fun of the style of Coke and Pepsi advertising. Another respondent described her attempts to catch the end of a jingle she liked:

> They had one for Alphabites: "A is for Alpha, B is for bites, C for yourself, they taste just right [laughter]. D is for dinner, E is for egg....A through to Z". And I used to watch that advert and think, I must remember, and I never could catch the last bit....video button paused ready in case it came on so you could learn the wee tune...
> (female worker 21-24)

Respondents also selected images from magazine ads and recreated them as posters:

> ...I cut them out and I've got them on my walls in clip frames. Cos some of them are beautiful.
> (unemployed female 21-24)

Male as well as the female respondents talked about using ads in this way. One respondent described a Budweiser ad which he had put up in his room. Another commented that Guinness ads generally made nice posters, and someone else (a trainee accountant) regretted that he had never managed to get hold of a copy of the Smirnoff ad with the headline which said "I used to be an accountant until I discovered Smirnoff".

They described games they played with ads, guessing what products were being advertised, or how a particular ad would end.

> I remember when I was young we used to play this game, to see who could name the ad before it actually mentioned the product [laughter]. (unemployed male 18-20)

> One of my pals used to speak all the words before they'd speak them, speaking as they would speak them. Quite funny. (male worker 21-24)

In general, these jokes and games and activities suggest that advertising may offer these respondents a creative outlet, even another kind of escapism, by allowing them to pretend, to play, to make their own fun from the raw material of advertising. Without advertising, suggested one respondent, "there'd be less things to take the mickey out of". Playfulness is described by Featherstone (1991) as an essential element of the postmodern condition: when certainty breaks down, and nothing can be absolutely mastered, irony and playfulness are useful lines of defence. The behaviour of respondents may perhaps be explained in these terms.

5.7. Aspirations and role models

As mentioned earlier, one student suggested that some of her male friends drank Guinness in order to be cool like Rutger Hauer. In one of the male groups, there was some support for this view:

> There's an image to create, to put a product in a situation that by having that product, you yourself...In the Guinness you're cool, it's a cool advert, in Gold Blend again it's sophistication.
> (male student, 18-20)

While this, and the discussion about the merits of various brands of jeans, suggest that the male respondents did relate advertising to their self-image, they tended to discuss advertising and their personal aspirations more in terms of acquisition - cars they would like to own, for example. They suspected however that women perhaps used actors in ads as role models. In one of the male working groups, which was particularly taken with an ad for tights featuring Kim Bassinger, there was some discussion about whether women would be interested in the ad at all:

> - I dinnae think women would pay much attention to Kim Bassinger though. Sort of, like we would.
> - Oh aye. Possibly, but they can see what she would like. She uses this sort of make-up and she does this with her hair and she uses this.
> (male workers, 18-20)

They accepted "to some extent" that they may look at men in ads to see what they were using, although they were at pains to point out that they were not "always trying to look good and what have you". Female respondents certainly seemed more open in discussing their use of actors in ads as role models. While the male admissions related mainly to looking or being "cool", female respondents were particularly interested in the physical attractiveness of the women featured in ads, rather than their lifestyle or personality. Thus, they admired "gorgeous" models, who had "really nice hair" or were "beautifully dressed". This is consistent with the study conducted by Richins (1991) which found that women compare themselves with the models featured in ads. She also found that such comparisons were related to their dissatisfaction with their own bodies. One respondent, talking about the Levi's and Gold Blend ads, said that they

> ...make you want to lose weight because people are dead glamorous. You go away and you want to put make-up on. (female student, 18-20)

This difference between male and female respondents in the use of role models may be attributed to the "peacock effect" of having male respondents talk in the presence of a female researcher. They may have been less willing to admit such behaviour to a woman. Alternatively, given that they are relatively recent targets for the personal grooming and fashion industries, men may be simply less open in discussing such issues even among each other, or less conscious of their own behaviour in this respect.

5.8. Checking out the opposite sex

Respondents frequently assessed the attractiveness of actors in ads. While female respondents sometimes used the women in ads as role models, they were not slow to comment on the men in the ads either: male models (particularly in the Levi's ads) were described as "quite cute", "quite smart", "nice lads", "the guys, the talent". Similarly, male respondents commented about the women in various ads:

> That's quite a nice advert. I'd go out with her any time. (male graduate worker 21-24)

> I forget the name of the tights, I'm too busy looking at her (male worker 18-20)

This may reflect respondents' "surveillance" behaviour in their everyday lives, observing and assessing the attractiveness of members of the opposite sex and discussing it with others. Certainly these would seem to be ideal conditions for such behaviour, as the objects of attention are remote and there is no danger of having to interact with them. However, if the idealised images of models undermine women's sense of their own attractiveness, there are grounds for concern here as well: if advertising is influential in setting standards of attractiveness for potential partners, respondents may be setting themselves up for disappointment. Furthermore, these standards may lead to distress among those who cannot meet them. It is hard not to feel for the respondent watching television with her boyfriend:

> And really, it makes you think "oh no, what must I be like?". I mean you're sitting with your boyfriend and he's saying "oh look at her, what a body!". (female student 18-20)

5.9. Reinforcement of attitudes and values

Buttle (1991) suggests that advertising is essentially raw material which we process and reprocess to make sense of our world. There were some indications of advertising being processed by respondents in this way, as some ads seemed to be used to work through or reinforce respondents' attitudes and values. For example, a student described how he was troubled by his reaction to an ad for tights. He worried that he remembered the ad "for the wrong reasons", and he then tried to untangle, or perhaps rationalise, his response to it. He could not decide whether the ad was "sexual", "sensual" or "sexist". He thought it might be sensual rather than sexist as it was aimed at women, but he reckoned that it "hit all men on the sexual basis". Furthermore,

> You might say well it promotes a stereotype of the woman wearing stockings and looking sexy, but then ..there is an element of independence that when her car broke down she fixed it herself, didn't get a man to do it. (male student 21-24)

Not all respondents articulated the working through of their values as clearly as this, but it did seem that in some cases where respondents were describing ads, they were also telling stories which had at least as much to do with their own concerns. For example, one respondent told in great detail the story of an ad for Tennent's lager, in which a Scot returns home to Edinburgh after working in London:

> It's sort of like he's down in London and you see him walking through the busy streets, tube station and all that and you can see he's really pissed off with it all. And then he gets through into his office building, stands in the lift, looks about and says to hell with this. Sort of walks away and the next minute you see him in Princes Street and the music's quite good in the background, like a sort of song about Scotland and things like that. He comes into the bar, has his pint with his mates and then the next second you see... the bird, obviously his bird, on the tube in London opening up the letter with his photo. And she didnae look too pleased about it!
> (male worker 18-20)

This long description, ostensibly the straightforward telling of the tale, may perhaps tell us more about the respondent himself. Undoubtedly he is "involved" with this ad: he remembers it in detail, and he identifies with the main character to the extent that he describes his thoughts as well as his actions.

Perhaps he identifies with the ad so closely because it reinforces some of his own values. For example, the Scot in the ad leaves London and comes home to Edinburgh. As this group expressed quite a lot of pride in Scotland generally, that would have been well received. Additionally, the rejection of London in the ad may have reassured the respondent that he is not missing out on anything by having stayed in Scotland himself - he would not have liked it in London either.

Furthermore, in telling the story, this respondent also seems to endorse several values implicit in the ad. Work is not satisfying (hence the gusto of the "to hell with this" in the lift at the start of another day): what really counts in life is being with your mates and having a pint with them. Girlfriends are not so important (hence the relatively disparaging term "bird"), and it does no harm to put them in their place.

It seems clear that in telling the story of this ad in this way, the respondent was finding some resonance between the ad and his own perspective on life. It would be interesting to know how the others in the group interpreted his story, and whether this ad was providing not just the raw material for one person's attempts to make sense of his world, but also the basis for making these known to his peers.

5.10 Education

A limited educational role for advertising was recognised by some respondents. One male working group insisted that the privatisation ads for the two Scottish Electricity companies were "putting across a lot of Scottish history". These ads certainly featured historical characters such as Robert the Bruce, Bonny Prince Charlie and Flora MacDonald, although the educational argument was undermined somewhat by the fact that her part was played by half a comedy duo, and in drag. However, what matters here is the uses which respondents find for advertising, and at some level, those ads reminded that group of their Scottish history and heritage. Indeed, the ads may have been used to legitimate their national pride, which harks back to the familiarity and value reinforcement categories previously discussed.

Other examples of advertising's educational role were more intuitively convincing. It was suggested that bank and building society ads may teach people "how banks work" or the principles of interest. Ads were also credited with making people more aware of the environment, and of "what's happening in the world" more generally. Respondents also recognised that some ads were purely educational, such as those warning of the dangers of Aids, drink-driving and so on.

5.11. Surveillance

As we saw earlier, respondents sometimes found advertising a useful source of product information. They also talked about looking at the clothes or jewellry worn by actors in ads, and were also interested in seeing what style of house or kind of room was featured. Thus, advertising was considered a source of information on "just up to date fashion sort of things". In addition to its provision of information about their environment, however, respondents were also interested in advertising as part of that environment:

> It's almost as if advertising's become a thing like sport, and it's something you can watch, see the latest...there's different things you can pay attention to in your life and advertising's just one of the things that you pay attention to. What's new in the cinema? What's advertising doing these days?
> (male graduate worker 21-24)

Thus, when respondents talked about advertising with their friends, it was often to ask or be asked whether they had seen "the new ad" or "the latest one" in a campaign.

5.12. Ego-enhancement

Respondents liked to know who was advertising something, and what was going on in advertisements. This may be related to the use of advertising for surveillance purposes, but it also seemed bound up in their sense of self-worth: of being in control of their surroundings, of being intelligent, getting involved (Crosier 1983), and in Lull's (1980, 1990) terms, of demonstrating their competence. Indeed, one respondent considered understanding ads to be a very basic skill:

> adverts in general insult your intelligence so much that if you don't understand it you get really worried about it...you think you're really stupid if you can't understand an advert.
>
> (male student 18-20)

In this light, his virtual panic at not being able to work one out becomes understandable:

> The first time I saw the Benson & Hedges one I didn't understand what it was and I thought "God almighty, this is horrendous, I can't get this advert!". And I thought, maybe if I put all these letters together I might work it out. Benson & Hedges, thank goodness for that.

Perhaps a clearer illustration of the use of advertising to demonstrate competence is provided by respondents' enjoyment of ads which were generally accepted as "bad", "awful", or "tacky". Cinema advertising, particularly by local advertisers, was thought to be "so corny it's great", and "very amusing because most of them are so silly". Some extremely low-budget, "awful" television ads were also discussed with great pleasure:

> I really love, it's so cheap, the Balmoral Double Glazing. It's so bad...
> - I like the one for Martin's Plant Hire
> - Not, oh please no, oh no!
> - Oh it's awful!
> - It's quite a good advert. It's just so horrible, that's why I like it. (female students 18-20)

Clearly these ads are recognised as "bad". As discussed earlier, these may serve a simple diversion or novelty function, given the relative professionalism of most advertising. However, that would not fully explain the positive, almost perverse pleasure which these ads seemed to provide. Perhaps respondents found them entertaining precisely because they were so awful.

If the "badness" of these ads is indeed the source of their appeal, this is arguably only possible because respondents are sophisticated consumers of advertising: they recognise that these ads dramatically break the conventions of "good" advertising and they relish that. This in turn allows them to congratulate themselves for their discernment (they recognise good and bad ads) and their independent spirit (they can choose to celebrate rather than denigrate bad ads). In what amounts to knowing subversiveness, respondents seem to be like film buffs in their enjoyment of B movies: perhaps Balmoral and Martin's Plant Hire are the advertising industry's equivalent of Godzilla, and enjoyed by the consumer connoisseurs in that spirit. The knowingness and irony which such an attitude suggests may again be related to Featherstone's (1991) postmodern condition. In terms of uses and gratifications, however, enjoying the "B movie" ads may provide respondents with a sense of their own taste, sophistication and even their subversion of "the system" of advertising. Discussing it with others presumably is a means of projecting and reinforcing these positive images of themselves.

5.13. Family relationships

Advertising featured in a variety of ways in respondents' interactions with their families. It was occasionally a source of tension, as some female respondents talked about their embarrassment at watching television with male family members (particularly teasing brothers) when personal hygiene ads came on. While these ads seemed to cut across the family along gender lines, others appeared to establish boundaries across generations. Thus, the British Telecom ads reminded one respondent of the way some older members of her family behaved. Generational boundaries could also be established by differential responses to ads. For example, if older family members did not "get" a particular ad, they were effectively excluded:

> Me and my brother were watching it and my mum came through and we were killing ourselves laughing and she went "ha ha". She wasn't laughing, she wasn't as enthusiastic as we were.
>
> (female student 18-20)

On the other hand, ads could be used to remove generational boundaries by establishing some common ground. For example, one of the male students said he was always looking out for something in British Telecom ads which he could use to tease his mother, who worked for that company.

5.14. Peer relationships

There were some indications of advertising being used for the purposes of male solidarity or "bonding". For example, there were many male references to and re-enactments of the Hamlet "world cup" ad with particular reference to the point where a sensitive part of a footballer's anatomy was struck. One respondent explained that the ad had been the subject of much discussion in the pub, and that "the guys were wincing at that one!". The Hamlet ad was also a source of great amusement with female respondents. They found the injured man's misfortunes quite entertaining, but found the ad had other pay-offs for them as well:

> It was really good how they had that at the time of the World Cup. Cos you were sitting in the middle of this...and it just totally broke the ice. Cos you were sitting bored watching the football and you thought oh that is really funny. And that did appeal to everybody.
>
> (female student 18-20)

As Lull (1990) has pointed out, the mass media facilitates communication in that it provides common ground, and an immediate agenda for talk. Indeed, a significant use of advertising appeared to be as a topic of conversation, at three levels. The first, most basic level was purely instrumental. Advertising, particularly on television, was an easy topic of conversation, almost a default option. Everyone was familiar with the same ads, and so they were easily drawn upon if things went quiet or there was nothing else to talk about. However, there were indications that it was also considered to be an interesting topic, worthy of talk in its own right:

> - It's a handy number when you're sort of stuck for conversation and you've just met someone.
> - No, I tend to talk about adverts mostly with my friends.
> - It's actually part of the conversation, not just filling in gaps. (unemployed females, 21-24)

Other respondents pointed out that even though they might be watching television with friends, it was the ads which tended to generate comment and discussion. At the third level is advertising as discourse: talking about advertising is a distinct social skill, and there are conventions and expectations regarding an individual's competence in its practice. This may exp ain why the student felt stupid if he could not understand an ad, and his subsequent statement that "you've got to work it out in case it comes up in conversation". It also explains the seriousness with which some respondents approached the question of "meaning" in ads:

> You probably go into work the next day and say "Did you see that advert for lager, what the hell is that supposed to mean? Is it supposed to advertise lager?" (male worker, 21-24)

Willis (1990) suggested that advertising is a form of cultural capital for young people. The different ways in which respondents seem to use it in their conversations would support this. At the first, instrumental level, we can think of advertising as small change which feeds the meter of interaction. By the time we

reach the third level, however, we can think of advertising as large banknotes to be invested carefully for their dividends in terms of social status and self-esteem.

6. CONCLUSIONS

Given the small sample size, the age restrictions and the qualitative approach used in this study, it would be unwise to conclude with grand pronouncements about the nature of the advertising consumer. However, this study does provide some empirical support for the academics and practitioners who have long argued that audiences are active, selective and sophisticated in their consumption of advertising. Furthermore, it seems that in their playfulness, subversiveness and self-conscious knowingness, young people at any rate are comfortable and confident players with what Davidson (1992) calls "advertising in postmodern times".

In light of the many ways in which advertisements provided satisfaction to respondents in this study, advertising seems at least as fruitful an area for the application of uses and gratifications theory as any other element of the mass media. The uses of advertising which emerged from this study may be tentatively classified as marketing or non-marketing, and as personal, social-oriented (in that they involve consumers looking beyond themselves to their social environment) and social.

Table 1. Classification of Advertising Uses and Gratifications

	Personal	Social-oriented	Social
Marketing	Information Choice/competition Convenience Quality assurance/ quality reassurance Consumption stimulation Vicarious consumption		Added value
Non-marketing	Structuring time Diversion Entertainment Escapism Play Education Surveillance Ego-enhancement	Familiarity Aspirations/ role models Checking out opposite sex Reinforcement of attitudes and values	Play Ego enhancement Family relationships Peer relationships

Some uses seem to belong in more than one place on this grid; for example, play may be individual or collective. However, such a framework has many elements which are comparable with classifications of general and other mass media uses and gratifications. If advertising serves similar functions as the rest of the media, this in turn suggests that advertising is well-integrated into the mass media and indeed into the lives of its audience.

One criticism of the uses and gratifications approach raised earlier was its tendency to provide lists of reasons for attending to the media, unaccompanied by systematic explanation. In the case of advertising, even such lists of uses are significant, as they undermine the conventional wisdom of advertising models which privilege the sender's intentions over the receiver's interpretations (Buttle 1990), and assume a passive rather than active audience (Lannon 1992). Acceptance of the active, reward-seeking consumer requires a fundamental re-orientation of the entire advertising planning process. Thus, research techniques need to become more sensitive and creative. Advertisements themselves can afford to be more demanding of their audience, and need to find ways of providing ostensibly non-marketing gratifications for consumers without losing sight of advertising objectives. Finally, methods of evaluation need to be based on more complex and less mechanistic models of advertising effects.

Furthermore, there is much scope for integrating studies of advertising uses and gratifications within broader theoretical frameworks. In terms of the analysis of this data, the next phase will seek to link the uses identified here with interpretations of specific messages, and look for differences in patterns of use and interpretation between respondents according to age, gender and occupational status. It will also consider the implications for advertising involvement. Our understanding of the state, antecedents and consequences of advertising involvement is currently inadequate (O'Donohoe 1991). It does seem, however, that the uses to which consumers put advertising may explain, at least in part, why consumers allow themselves to become involved with particular advertisements.

Finally, as this study focused on one age-group and one geographic region, it would be interesting to compare the pattern of uses and gratifications identified here with other age-groups and other cultures.

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ADVERTISING USES AND GRATIFICATIONS

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There is growing recognition of consumers' advertising sophistication and the complexity of the relationship between advertisements and their audience. In this context, various practitioners and academics have argued that research should address what consumers do with advertising, rather than what advertising does to them. In developing our understanding of such issues, a uses and gratifications approach to the study of advertising may be helpful.

According to uses and gratifications theory, the mass media constitute a resource which audiences draw upon to satisfy various needs. In its conception of an active, goal-[1]directed audience, it is consistent with emerging views of the advertising consumer. However, there has been little application of this approach to the study of advertising, either in theoretical or empirical terms.

This paper provides an overview of the literature in this area. It then offers a classification of advertising uses and gratifications derived from a qualitative study. Finally, it assesses the implications of such an approach for the theory and practice of advertising and offers suggestions for further research.

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USES AND GRATIFICATIONS RESEARCH

Origins and Basic Principles

A uses and gratifications approach to the study of communication was first formally outlined by Katz [1]. He suggested that communication research should reverse the traditional question of what the media do to people, and ask instead what people do with the media. This formulation was not entirely original, however. It was rooted in a research stream which emerged in the 1940s as an antidote to the "magic bullet" approach advocated by the Frankfurt School since the turn of the century.

The Frankfurt School's view of the media as exerting powerful and direct influence on individuals' behaviour and beliefs had been undermined by findings on selective perception, individual differences and social processes. Taken together, these research strands indicated that audiences were active in their selection of content and messages from the mass media. In the 1940s, numerous studies examined the way in which audiences used various media and genres such as classical radio music, radio soap operas, and daily newspapers [2-4].

Katz et al [5,6] outline the basic assumptions of a uses and gratifications approach. Firstly, the audience is active, and thus much mass media use is goal-directed. Secondly, the initiative in linking need gratification with media choice lies largely with the audience member. Thirdly, the media compete with other sources of need satisfaction. Finally, the gratifications sought from the media include diversion and entertainment as well as information, and these will vary according to the social roles and psychological disposition of individual audience members.

Classifications

Several classifications of mass media uses have been suggested. Lasswell [7] suggested that they facilitated the transmission of social heritage, surveillance of the environment, and correlation, or selection and interpretation of information. In adding entertainment to the uses of the mass media, Wright [8] anticipated a category which was to assume great importance in other typologies. For example, Stephenson [9] emphasised the opportunities for play and pleasure, while McQuail et al [10] noted that escapism appeared to be the most common motivation attributed to users of the mass media.

Schramm et al [11] referred to deferred/reality and immediate/fantasy rewards, and Weiss [12] suggested that the mass media may satisfy informational-educational and fantasist-escapist needs. These resemble the surveillance and diversion categories offered by McQuail et al [10]. However, these authors also suggested that the mass media may satisfy needs relating to personal identity and relationships. Similarly, Katz et al [5] proposed that mass media needs may be cognitive, affective, or both,

and oriented towards an individual's sense of self or the social environment.

More recently, Lull [13,14] proposed a comprehensive framework for assessing the social uses of the mass media. He suggested that these may be structural or relational. Structural uses could be environmental (providing background noise, companionship, or entertainment) or regulative (structuring time, activity or talk). Relational uses were fourfold. Firstly, the mass media could facilitate communication. Secondly, they provide opportunities for interpersonal affiliation or avoidance. Thirdly, they offer opportunities for social learning, and finally, they allow individuals to demonstrate their competence or dominance.

Anderson and Meyer [15] offer further insights into the social nature of media use. They argue that we are socially situated beings, constantly engaged in making sense of our environment and our lives. In our society, the media form a natural and expected part of the environment. Therefore, media use is embedded in the routines of social action, and we interpret mediated messages by accommodating them into the methods and practices of everyday life.

Criticisms

The uses and gratifications research tradition has been challenged on various grounds. Firstly, while it assumes that the audience is active and in control, Lometti et al [16] argue that uses and gratifications are mediators of rather than substitutes for media effects, and Barratt [2] questions the view that there are no "hidden messages" in media content.

Secondly, some analysts have doubted the validity of self-reports on the uses sought or gratifications obtained from the media. They argue that such an approach is too simplistic, particularly in light of the complexity of human motivation[4,17].

The means of obtaining these self-reports have also been questioned. Many studies have only used multiple-choice questionnaires based on uses and gratifications defined a priori by researchers. While Lometti et al [16] criticise such approaches, they suggest that in-depth interviews also have problems. For example, they argue that informants may wish to appear more rational than they actually are. This is not consistent with the range of fantasy, play and escape uses identified in studies conducted by McQuail et al [10]. However, Becker [18] found some informants were unable to specify the gratifications got from media use when asked open-ended questions, although they readily identified them from a list of alternatives. Given these concerns about self-reports, open-ended and multiple-choice questions, the ethnographic approach used by Lull [13,14] suggests a useful way forward. Rather than relying on a direct and standardised questionnaire, administered out of the viewing context to individuals, he based his classification on participant observation and semi-structured interviews with various household members in their own environment.

Concern has also been expressed about the limited scope of uses and gratification

research. Palmgreen et al [19] argue that there is still much to learn about the relationship between gratifications sought and obtained, the antecedents of such gratifications, and the ways in which they relate to media behaviour. Similarly, McLeod and Becker [17] advocate broader, more systematic and complex models of uses and gratifications. They, and others such as Morley [20] and Barratt [2] criticise the focus on common needs, rather than on the different uses to which various social groups may put the media. Morley [20] has called for research linking different patterns of gratifications sought with meanings and interpretations given to specific media messages. In his own work on differing interpretations of a particular television programme, and the family television viewing experience [20,21] he demonstrates the promise of such an approach.

More fundamentally, uses and gratifications research has been criticised for being vague and nontheoretical. It has been accused of simply restating some aspects of selective influence theories, and offering little more than a data collection strategy and lists of reasons why people attend to the mass media [3,4].

Taken together, these criticisms may indicate that much research in this tradition is methodologically flawed and theoretically redundant. However, Severin and Tankard [4] argue that it is valuable even as an antidote to the emphasis elsewhere on the persuasion of passive audiences. Indeed, it could be argued that it has yet to achieve its potential. As we have seen, there have been calls for more comprehensive and theoretically integrated models [17,19], and Morley [20,21] and Lull [13,14] have offered some guidance on the use of more sensitive research methods.

Advertising Applications

There is at least a quarter-century of implicit support among British advertising practitioners for a uses and gratifications approach to the study of advertising. Joyce [22] insisted that "the consumer is not passive, helpless advertising fodder", while Hedges [23] suggested that it might be more useful to think less about what advertising does to people, and more about what people do with advertising. McDonald [24] decried the "myth of causality" which implied that each ad had its own electric charge to be "transmitted to its victim on impact". He argued that the consumer is not passive, but rather chooses to pay attention, and that an ad's only value is that which the consumer gives it. Similarly, Meadows [25] talked about active, sophisticated "consumers of advertising", and Lannon [26] observed that consumers expect advertising to provide aesthetic, emotional or intellectual rewards.

However, it appears that many practitioners and researchers have not accepted the implications of such a perspective: Lannon [27, p16] still finds herself having to argue the case for a "new model" to inform the development and evaluation of advertising,

> ...because the common strand running through the entire process starts from the same basis, the question of what do people do with advertising: how do they use it? And what do they use it for?

Thus, there is support within the advertising industry for a view of advertising consumers as active and seeking various rewards from their encounters with advertisements. While it is plausible that some of these rewards are similar to the classifications discussed above for the mass media in general, little work has explicitly addressed the uses and gratifications of advertising.

Crosier [28], influenced by the work of May [29], suggests that we consume advertising for at least seven kinds of satisfaction, namely product information, entertainment, implied warranty, value addition, post-purchase reassurance, vicarious experience, and involvement. Vicarious experience is the opportunity to experience situations or lifestyles to which we would not otherwise have access. Involvement refers to the intellectual pleasure of participation in the puzzles or jokes offered by some advertisements. More recently, Alwitt and Prabhaker [30] suggest that consumers' attitudes to television advertising are related to the functions which it serves for them. Drawing upon some of the uses and gratifications literature, they incorporated four such functions into their attitude model: hedonic, knowledge, social learning or contact, and value affirmation. They found that all four functions were related to attitudes to television advertising, although due to intercorrelation, the hedonic function was the only significant predictor of attitudes.

Buttle [31] reviews various studies on the role of television advertising in interpersonal communication, and found a limited role in generating conversation. Children however sometimes used it to initiate or influence interaction with family members, or for ideas for play.

Some further insights are provided by Willis [32], who conducted an ethnographic study concerning young adults' meanings and interpretations of popular cultural forms. While the focus of this study was on music, fashion and the media in general, there is some mention of advertising. He argues that young people are adept at, and enjoy decoding complex messages, jokes and cross-references. He also suggests that they use ads as "tokens" in social exchanges, and consume them independently of the advertised product.

Thus, as a part of the mass media, advertising may offer its audience various uses and gratifications. Some of these (information, entertainment, reassurance, and added value) may be related directly to marketing or objectives. Others, such as personal identity, social relationships and vicarious experience may or may not be related to these objectives.

THE PRESENT STUDY

The classification of advertising uses and gratifications presented below is derived from group discussions undertaken as part of a larger study of the relationship between young adults aged 18-24 and advertising, focusing on their experience of advertising in their everyday lives.

This age-group has been credited with a particularly sophisticated understanding of advertising [32,33]. Therefore, we might expect young adults' relationship with it to be especially interesting, and perhaps of broader significance: Davis [34] has pointed out that cultural changes originating with this age-group often find their way into mainstream adult culture. This group also represents a lucrative but shrinking market segment in Britain, so that offerings aimed at them (including advertising) must be extremely well-targeted [35]. Finally, as this particular cohort grows, it will become the target audience for an ever wider range of advertised goods and services.

In contrast to much research on media uses and gratifications, which has relied on direct, structured, multiple-choice questionnaires, a qualitative approach was adopted for this study. Burns [35] describes qualitative research as "experiencing the experiences of others". This was very much the intention here. While Lull [13,14] used participant observation as well as semi-structured interviews to identify a range of television uses, participant observation was not adopted in this study. Given the pervasiveness of advertising, the many media in which it is encountered, and the often private nature of its consumption, it was thought that a combination of group discussions and individual interviews would be a more useful way to begin exploring young adults' experience of advertising. Small groups (usually involving four participants) were used for the benefits of social interaction and idea stimulation [37], combined with the potential for exploring individual comments and interpretations in more detail than large groups allow [38]. Individual interviews were used to allow more detailed exploration of individual experiences, interpretations and idiosyncrasies [36].

Informants were encouraged to describe their experience of advertising in their own words, in their own way, and with their own examples. In this context, it would have been inappropriate for the researcher to impose a set of ads. Instead, following some discussion of general media habits and preferences, informants described ads which they liked, disliked or remembered for any reason, and from any time or medium. Given the age and purchasing interests of informants, much discussion revolved around ads for alcohol, coffee, soft drinks, confectionery and jeans; as one informant observed, "the adverts we like are the ones for things we're interested in". Subsequent discussion of attitudes, interpretations and uses of advertising emerged from, and was grounded in, their own experience of advertisements. Thus, informants' thoughts were not directed immediately or explicitly to uses and gratifications, nor were they required to report on these at an abstract, generalised level.

Consistent with the principles of grounded theory [39], the researcher sought to generate theory through the joint collection, coding and analysis of data. The constant comparative method of analysis was used, whereby tentative categories and their properties are identified by comparing incidents and instances from the data obtained initially. These emergent categories and properties are modified and developed by comparison with instances from subsequent fieldwork and different cases, and others may emerge. Eventually, the theory will be delimited as fresh instances no longer point to new aspects, and categories may be reduced to a smaller number of higher-order concepts.

In order to explore a range of experiences and differential patterns of use and interpretation [17,21], age, gender and occupational status quotas were used. Given the difficulties of measuring occupational status in this age-group [40,41], informants were simply classified as unemployed, students or workers. For the older groups, the working category was divided into graduate and non-graduate. It was thought that this would provide some approximation of current buying power and future prospects, both of which may help to shape an individual's use and interpretation of advertisements.

A pilot study involved four small group discussions and two individual interviews. The main phase of the research was conducted in Edinburgh between May and July 1991. It involved fourteen groups and fourteen individual interviews, organised by a professional recruiter. In total, eighty-two informants participated in the project, and discussions generally took between an hour and a half and two hours.

A wide range of uses for advertising emerged from an analysis of the group discussions. Some uses may be seen as directly facilitating marketing transactions, while others have little to do with this aspect of informants' lives. In making the distinction between marketing and non-marketing uses below, however, the focus is on the uses to which consumers, rather than advertisers, put advertising. For example, entertainment, which may be intended by the advertiser to gain attention, is considered here as a non-marketing use.

MARKETING USES OF ADVERTISING

Informants generally talked about advertising as providing information about products, thereby facilitating choice, convenience and competition. There were also suggestions that it provided reassurance and stimulated consumption-related aspirations.

Information

Advertising was used as a source of information, primarily on availability and price. An example used by several informants was looking for a new CD player, where

they would look at advertisements to find out more about them and to see if there were any sales on. However, they were aware of the limitations of advertising in providing information:

> A lot of adverts...don't really tell you anything about the product, do they? It's just a story. I prefer the more informative adverts. [female graduate worker, 21-24]

There seemed to be little expectation that advertising would tell consumers much about actual product features. Thus, a male student remarked in mild amazement that a particular ad "actually provides you with some information about the car". Another informant was extremely cynical about the value of information provided in ads for toiletries:

> ...they talk about complex biological structures...You just want to wash your hair, you don't want triple DNA combinations. I mean it just means absolutely nothing
> [female graduate worker, 21-24]

One area of particular interest to informants was information about new products. While some questioned the need for established brands to advertise, they "could understand it if it was new products that were coming out". Even washing powder ads, which informants tended to despise, were tolerated "if it's something new".

It may be that this concern with newness reflects a sense of boredom and tedium, expressed by many informants due to repeated exposure to the same ads. Thus, the newness of a product may offer a diversion similar to a new advertising execution. However, their enthusiasm for new product ads seems to extend beyond this into the realm of surveillance. Asked if they would miss advertising if it were to disappear altogether, informants were consistently concerned that they would lose out:

> I think I'd certainly miss it because how would you find out about new things?
> [female student, 21-24]

> You wouldn't like to miss out on anything like an amazing new breakfast cereal that they're making! [female graduate worker, 21-24]

Overall, then, informants used advertising to some extent at least for information on the existence of new products, and the price and availability of more established (and usually expensive) products. In a minority of cases, however, the information sought or obtained from advertising went beyond this. Thus, a drink-driving ad was described as "good informative advertising - the more you see it, the more you maybe think about it", and in one of the unemployed groups, a desire was expressed for ads which provided information on sports or training opportunities, or simply things to do outside the house.

Choice, Competition and Convenience

Advertising was thought to facilitate choice in two ways. Firstly, it stimulated competition, providing people with more alternatives, and secondly, it told people about those alternatives. Without advertising,

> You wouldn't hear about any new products and there would be less competition. So you would have just the one product, not having a huge choice because you haven't really heard of things.
> [female student 18-20]

A male student talked about the horrors of going to the supermarket and being faced with six bottles of washing-up liquid and not knowing which one to pick. He thought that "even just an advert can help you to choose, just to decide, to pick something".

Thus, informants did not seem to question the ideology of the marketplace and advertising's role within it. In this last example, advertising is seen as an aid to choice, but there is no questioning of the value of choice when the six options are so similar that "even just an advert" can make the difference.

In another group, the idea of choice was related to convenience, in that more time would have to be spent in the supermarket to decide on what to buy. This group suggested that even if advertising in its current forms were to disappear, other ways of drawing people's attention to products would be found, such as "speaking cornflake boxes".

Quality Assurance and Reassurance

As Crosier [28] suggests, advertising can be used as an implied warranty, in that a company which advertises its brands is seen to stand behind them. Thus, a student talked about his sense of unease after buying a music system which was not advertised, although he had sought expert advice. Even with less risky purchases, there was still some concern:

> If a brand stopped advertising you'd think, where are the adverts? It must be going really downhill. [male student 18-20]

Consumption Stimulation

There was some recognition that advertising could be used to stimulate consumption, though not necessarily of the actual product being advertised. One informant, while having no interest in furniture ads, recognised that when she was older and had a home to furnish, she might be stimulated by an ad to think about buying something similar. Others suggested that they might buy a white T-shirt, for example, from looking at the way the actors in a Coke ad were dressed. In another group, sales of gold coffee-bean jewellery were attributed to the Nescafe Gold Blend ads.

Added Value

According to Willis [32], it is during our teenage and early adult years that we are formed most self-consciously through our symbolic and other activities. We may expect advertising to play an important role in this, as it often deals in images of

self-identity and social relationships [42,43]. In some cases, particularly where advertising develops brand image and personality [44], it may add value by enhancing self-image. Thus, one informant suggested that several of her male friends drank Guinness to be cool like Rutger Hauer, the actor featured in the Guinness ads. Similarly, there was some discussion in one of the male working groups about merits of Levi's jeans compared to two retailer brands. Levi's, though advertising, had established a premium image so that

> If you got 501's you were THE person. You bought 501's and that was it.
>
> When you go down to the pub on a Saturday night and everyone's buying Holsten, if you've got a pair of C & A's you feel, oh... [laughter]
>
> ...They're quite homey, middle of the road, you put them on, that's it [Marks & Spencer's jeans]. Levi's, you've definitely got a trendy pair of jeans, quite smart, a bit special.
>
> [male workers, 21-24]

Vicarious consumption

One informant mentioned that she liked buying Vogue and Tatler magazines, which were "just purely adverts".

> I'm only interested in looking at the adverts for the clothes and the jewellery, and it's always like Van Cleef and Arpel jewellery and something like that. [female worker 21-24]

Crosier [28] suggested that consumers may use advertising to gain vicarious access to experiences and lifestyles which would otherwise be beyond their means. As this informant also spent an hour "going around looking at everything" in the jewellery department at Harrods on a recent trip to London, she seems to be seeking out vicarious consumption experiences. Such experiences may serve two purposes. They may be a form of escapism, if people do not expect to be able to afford them. Alternatively, they may be used as a form of consumer socialisation, fuelling and focusing aspirations. In this case, where the informant seemed particularly ambitious and confident, it is almost inconceivable that she could enjoy her vicarious consumption of the jewellery if she suspected it was a substitute rather than a rehearsal for actual ownership.

Among the unemployed groups, there was no evidence of advertising being used for vicarious consumption in either form. In fact, for the group which expressed the least hope for the future, ads for products beyond their means seemed almost unbearable, to the extent that one informant would pretend to herself that she had not seen the ads.

> - Suites, carpets, curtains, that's the kind of adverts you get now, which I just don't pay any attention to because I don't have the money to buy them, so what's the point of listening to them?
> - Ken, switch off while you're watching. [unemployed females, 18-20]

NON-MARKETING USES OF ADVERTISING

In addition to using ads for purposes related to marketing transactions, informants seemed to obtain many other gratifications from advertising.

Structuring Time

Lull [13,14] described how television programmes may be used to structure or "punctuate" time. Certainly television advertising seems to perform this function particularly well. For the informants in this study, commercial breaks offered at the very least, an opportunity to leave the room to put the kettle on, go to the toilet or even make short telephone calls. Indeed, there is macro-level evidence for this particular use of commercial breaks. For example, Whalan [45] refers to the "flush factor", the drop in water pressure coinciding with commercial breaks during television blockbusters such as "Roots", "Jaws" or "The Godfather". While there were several complaints in this study about breaks which spoiled good films or football matches, a number of informants actually complained about watching films on non-commercial stations, because "you have to sit down and watch these films for hours on end".

Diversion

Advertising was also thought to offer some diversionary benefits. It "broke up the text" in magazines, it made life richer and more colourful, it was something to look at when travelling on a bus, and "a break when there's nothing on TV and you're just sort of sitting there".

Such benefits may be offered by advertising in general, but there were some indications that particular ads were used for diversionary purposes. Thus one ad was described as "a break from your boring ads". This may even partly explain the attraction of some particularly low-budget ads which were generally accepted as "awful". As one informant observed, "most adverts are slick". Perhaps the "awful" low-budget ads, which were definitely not slick, were seen as offering some diversion from professionally produced ones, which were more common.

Entertainment

The American copywriter Robert Fine maintained that "entertainment is sort of repayment" to the audience for allowing advertisements to interrupt the editorial material and "push their way uninvited into somebody's mind" [44, p389]. Audiences certainly seem to welcome such payment. According to advertising researchers, many consumers say that the ads are often better than the television programmes [33,46]. In this study, the entertainment value of television ads were

frequently discussed in relation to the programmes. In a few cases, the relationship between the two was seen as economic, in that advertising funded commercial stations:

> The only thing I would agree with television advertising is it pays for the television company...I'd rather have adverts on BBC rather than pay money to them for a TV licence. [male worker, 21-24]

This view of television advertising as a "necessary evil" was not generally held. One informant mentioned that he had read somewhere that "more kids preferred adverts than the actual TV". Several described some ads as "like wee programmes", while many others thought the ads were "better" or "more interesting" than the programmes, worth watching for "the enjoyment" or "a good laugh". Particular sources of entertainment were music, humour, interesting ideas or visuals, attractive actors (usually of the opposite sex!), and "wee stories". The Nescafe Gold Blend ads, for example, were often compared to television mini-series, with interest expressed in the couple's relationship, what would happen next, and so on. The relationship between the story and the brand was sometimes problematic however: the Gold Blend ads were criticised for having no relationship to the coffee, while in the case of a Flake ad, the brand intruded into a good story:

> You do get frustrated waiting for her to pick up the phone. You want to know who's at the other end, waiting for her, and she's eating her Flake! [female worker, 18-20]

Overall then, it was clear from the groups that they used advertising as a form of entertainment in its own right, and many examples were given to illustrate this. One informant suggested that this was not surprising:

> There's an element of popular culture wrapped up in this. I mean people think it's fun, it interrupts your telly, it's quite amusing... [male graduate worker 21-24]

Familiarity

Informants seemed to welcome advertising for its reflection of familiar, everyday aspects of their own lives. For example, they liked recognising places in ads, and were pleased when ads used sets which were similar to their own homes. One student particularly liked a series of ads because they reminded her of the way older members of her own family behaved.

This may be related to Krugman's [47] description of involvement in terms of "connections" between the content of a persuasive stimulus and the content of the viewer's own life. However, this does not explain what use such connections may be to an ad's audience in general or these informants in particular. Perhaps seeing aspects of their own lives absorbed and played back to them by advertising, which generally depicts a world of desirability, provides legitimation and reassurance that their lives are not so much less attractive than others.

Escapism

There were some indications that informants also used ads for purposes relating to fantasy or escapism. An unemployed informant described the glorious sunshine on the deserted island of the Bounty ads as "pure escapism", for example, and another suggested that

> You don't want to watch down to earth adverts, you want something pretend, some fantasy. [unemployed male, 21-24]

Similarly, commenting on one of the Levi's ads, a student said

> You want someone to come driving through your office on a motorbike, get undressed under the table. Quite nice to think about. [female student 18-20]

Her identification with this situation was particularly interesting as she was a first-year student. For her, it was almost a double fantasy as she had no experience of full-time employment, let alone a knight in shining armour to take her away from it! In general, however, there was little explicit mention of using ads as a form of escapism, or of Crosier's [28] "vicarious experiences". Perhaps advertising was less a source of heady fantasy, and more a form of mild escapism through its offerings of "wee stories" and entertainment, and the opportunities it provided for play.

Play

Willis [32, p1] argues that

> ...there is a vibrant symbolic life and symbolic creativity in everyday life, everyday activity and expression...Most young people's lives are ...full of expressions, signs and symbols through which [they seek] to establish their presence, identity and meaning.

Similarly, Grafton-Small and Linstead [48] discuss the great sophistication displayed by "creative consumers" in their everyday understanding of ads, and Cook [49], writing from a linguistics perspective, suggests that advertising may fulfill a need for language play.

The creativity and "vibrant symbolic life" of informants in this study was certainly visible in their relations with advertising. They played with advertising in the course of the discussions, frequently acting out scenes from ads, trying on, discarding and making fun of various roles, characters, lines, and accents. Many characters were given walk-on parts in the course of the discussions, from Macbeth's witches, manipulative advertising executives and unloved traffic wardens, to celebrity endorsers, injured footballers, and turtles waxing lyrical about controlled heating systems.

Phrases from ads were incorporated into their everyday activities to particular effect:

> One of my friends uses the catchline all the time, the catchphrase and it makes me laugh. [female student, 18-20]

Informants described how they sang along with their favourite (or most hated) jingles, and in several cases they performed them for the group. For example, a male graduate astounded his group with his rendition of the lyrics from the ad for Irn-Bru (a Scottish soft drink), which made fun of the style of Coke and Pepsi advertising. Another informant described her attempts to catch the end of a jingle she liked:

> They had one for Alphabites: "A is for Alpha, B is for bites, C for yourself, they taste just right [laughter]. D is for dinner, E is for egg....A through to Z". And I used to watch that advert and think, I must remember, and I never could catch the last bit....video button paused ready in case it came on so you could learn the wee tune [female worker 21-24]

Informants also selected images from magazine ads and recreated them as posters:

> ..I cut them out and I've got them on my walls in clip frames. Cos some of them are beautiful. [unemployed female 21-24]

Male as well as female informants talked about using ads in this way. One informant described a Budweiser ad which he had put up in his room. Another commented that Guinness ads generally made nice posters, and someone else (a trainee accountant) regretted that he had never managed to get hold of a copy of the Smirnoff ad with the headline which said "I used to be an accountant until I discovered Smirnoff".

They described games they played with ads, guessing what products were being advertised, or how a particular ad would end.

> I remember when I was young we used to play this game, to see who could name the ad before it actually mentioned the product [laughter]. [unemployed male 18-20]

> One of my pals used to speak all the words before they'd speak them, speaking as they would speak them. Quite funny. [male worker 21-24]

In general, these jokes and games and activities suggest that advertising may offer these informants a creative outlet, even another kind of escapism, by allowing them to pretend, to play, to make their own fun from the raw material of advertising. Without advertising, suggested one informant, "there'd be less things to take the mickey out of". Playfulness is described by Featherstone [50] as an essential element of the postmodern condition: when certainty breaks down, and nothing can be absolutely mastered, irony and playfulness are useful lines of defence. The behaviour of informants may perhaps be explained in these terms.

Aspirations and Role Models

As mentioned earlier, one student suggested that some of her male friends drank Guinness in order to be cool like Rutger Hauer. In one of the male groups, there was some support for this view:

> There's an image to create, to put a product in a situation that by having that product, you yourself...In the Guinness you're cool, it's a cool advert, in Gold Blend again it's sophistication. [male student, 18-20]

While this, and the discussion about the merits of various brands of jeans, suggest that the male informants did relate advertising to their self-image, they tended to discuss advertising and their personal aspirations more in terms of acquisition - cars they would like to own, for example. They suspected however that women perhaps used actors in ads as role models. In one of the male working groups, which was particularly taken with an ad for tights featuring Kim Basinger, there was some discussion about whether women would be interested in the ad at all:

- I dinnae think women would pay much attention to Kim Basinger though. Sort of, like we would.
- Oh aye. Possibly, but they can see what she would like. She uses this sort of make-up and she does this with her hair and she uses this. [male workers, 18-20]

They accepted "to some extent" that they may look at men in ads to see what they were using, although they were at pains to point out that they were not "always trying to look good and what have you". Female informants certainly seemed more open in discussing their use of actors in ads as role models. While the male admissions related mainly to looking or being "cool", female informants were particularly interested in the physical attractiveness of the women featured in ads, rather than their lifestyle or personality. Thus, they admired "gorgeous" models, who had "really nice hair" or were "beautifully dressed". This is consistent with the study conducted by Richins [51] which found that women compare themselves with the models featured in ads. She also found that such comparisons were related to their dissatisfaction with their own bodies. One informant, talking about the Levi's and Gold Blend ads, said that they

> ...make you want to lose weight because people are dead glamorous. You go away and you want to put make-up on. [female student, 18-20]

This difference between male and female informants in the use of role models may be attributed to the "peacock effect" of having male informants talk in the presence of a female researcher. They may have been less willing to admit such behaviour to a woman. Alternatively, given that they are relatively recent targets for the personal grooming and fashion industries, men may be simply less open in discussing such issues even among each other, or less conscious of their own behaviour in this respect.

Checking Out the Opposite Sex

While the pattern would presumably vary according to the sexual orientation of consumers, informants in this study tended to assess actors of the same sex as themselves as role models, and those of the opposite sex in terms of their physical attraction. Thus, female informants described male actors (particularly those in the Levi's ads) as "quite cute", "quite smart", "nice lads", "the guys, the talent". Similarly, male informants commented about the women in various ads:

That's quite a nice advert. I'd go out with her any time. [male graduate worker 21-2]

I forget the name of the tights, I'm too busy looking at her. [male worker 18-20]

This may reflect informants' "surveillance" behaviour in their everyday lives, observing and assessing the extent to which they find others physically appealing. Certainly these would seem to be ideal conditions for such behaviour, as the objects of attention are remote and there is no danger of having to interact with them. However, if the idealised images of models have been found to undermine women's sense of their own attractiveness, there are grounds for concern here as well: if advertising is influential in setting standards of attractiveness for potential partners, informants may be setting themselves up for disappointment. Furthermore, these standards may lead to distress among those who cannot meet them. It is hard not to feel for the informant watching television with her boyfriend:

And really, it makes you think "oh no, what must I be like?". I mean you're sitting with your boyfriend and he's saying "oh look at her, what a body!". [female student 18-20]

Reinforcement of Attitudes and Values

Alwitt and Prabhaker [30] refer to television advertising as serving a value affirmation function. Similarly, Buttle [31] draws on accommodation theory [15] in suggesting that advertising is essentially raw material which we process and reprocess to make sense of our world. There were some indications of advertising being processed by informants in this way, as some ads seemed to be used to work through or reinforce informants' attitudes and values. For example, a student described how he was troubled by his reaction to an ad for tights. He worried that he remembered the ad "for the wrong reasons", and he then tried to untangle, or perhaps rationalise, his response to it. He could not decide whether the ad was "sexual", "sensual" or "sexist". He thought it might be sensual rather than sexist as it was aimed at women, but he reckoned that it "hit all men on the sexual basis". Furthermore,

You might say well it promotes a stereotype of the woman wearing stockings and looking sexy, but then...there is an element of independence that when her car broke down she fixed it herself, didn't get a man to do it. [male student 21-24]

Not all informants articulated the working through of their values as clearly as this, but it did seem that in some cases where informants were describing ads, they were also telling stories which had at least as much to do with their own concerns. For example, one informant told in great detail the story of an ad for Tennent's lager, in which a Scot returns home to Edinburgh after working in London:

> It's sort of like he's down in London and you see him walking through the busy streets, tube station and all that and you can see he's really pissed off with it all. And then he gets through into his office building, stands in the lift, looks about and says to hell with this. Sort of walks away and the next minute you see him in Princes Street and the music's quite good in the background, like a sort of song about Scotland and things like that. He comes into the bar, has his pint with his mates and then the next second you see... the bird, obviously his bird, on the tube in London opening up the letter with his photo. And she didnae look too pleased about it!
>
> [male worker 18-20]

This long description, ostensibly the straightforward telling of the tale, may perhaps tell us more about the informant himself. Undoubtedly he is "involved" with this ad: he remembers it in detail, and he identifies with the main character to the extent that he describes his thoughts as well as his actions.

Perhaps he identifies with the ad so closely because it reinforces some of his own values. For example, the Scot in the ad leaves London and comes home to Edinburgh. As this group expressed quite a lot of pride in Scotland generally, that would have been well received. Additionally, the rejection of London in the ad may have reassured the informant that he is not missing out on anything by having stayed in Scotland himself - he would not have liked it in London either.

Furthermore, in telling the story, this informant also seems to endorse several values implicit in the ad. Work is not satisfying (hence the gusto of the "to hell with this" in the lift at the start of another day): what really counts in life is being with your mates and having a pint with them. Girlfriends are not so important (hence the relatively disparaging term "bird"), and it does no harm to put them in their place.

It seems clear that in telling the story of this ad in this way, the informant was finding some resonance between the ad and his own perspective on life. It would be interesting to know how the others in the group interpreted his story, and whether this ad was providing not just the raw material for one person's attempts to make sense of his world, but also the basis for making these known to his peers.

Education

A limited educational role for advertising was recognised by some informants. One male working group insisted that the privatisation ads for the two Scottish Electricity companies were "putting across a lot of Scottish history". These ads certainly featured historical characters such as Robert the Bruce, Bonnie Prince Charlie and Flora MacDonald, although the educational argument was undermined somewhat by the fact that her part was played by half a comedy duo, and in drag. However, what matters here is the uses which informants find for advertising, and at some level, those ads reminded that group of their Scottish history and heritage. Indeed, the ads may have been used to legitimate their national pride, which harks back to the familiarity and value reinforcement categories previously discussed.

Other examples of educational uses for advertising were more intuitively convincing. It was suggested that bank and building society ads may teach people

"how banks work" or the principles of interest. Ads were also credited with making people more aware of the environment, and of "what's happening in the world" more generally. Informants also recognised that some ads were purely educational, such as those warning of the dangers of Aids, drink-driving and so on.

Surveillance

As we saw earlier, informants sometimes found advertising a useful source of product information. They also talked about looking at the clothes or jewellery worn by actors in ads, and were interested in seeing what style of house or kind of room was featured. Thus, advertising was considered a source of information on "just up to date fashion sort of things". In addition to its provision of information about their environment, however, informants were also interested in advertising as part of that environment:

> It's almost as if advertising's become a thing like sport, and it's something you can watch, see the latest...there's different things you can pay attention to in your life and advertising's just one of the things that you pay attention to. What's new in the cinema? What's advertising doing these days? [male graduate worker 21-24]

Thus, when informants talked about advertising with their friends, it was often to ask or be asked whether they had seen "the new ad" or "the latest one" in a campaign.

Ego Enhancement

Informants liked to know who was advertising something, and what was going on in advertisements. This may be related to the use of advertising for surveillance purposes, but it also seemed bound up in their sense of self-worth: of being in control of their surroundings, of being intelligent, getting involved [28] and demonstrating their competence [13,14]. Indeed, one informant considered understanding ads to be a very basic skill:

> Adverts in general insult your intelligence so much that if you don't understand it you get really worried about it...you think you're really stupid if you can't understand an advert. [male student 18-20]

In this light, his virtual panic at not being able to work one out becomes understandable:

> The first time I saw the Benson & Hedges one I didn't understand what it was and I thought "God almighty, this is horrendous, I can't get this advert!". And I thought "Maybe if I put all these letters together I might work it out. Benson & Hedges, thank goodness for that!"

Perhaps a clearer illustration of the use of advertising to demonstrate competence is provided by informants' enjoyment of ads which were generally accepted as "bad", "awful", or "tacky". Cinema advertising, particularly by local advertisers, was

thought to be "so corny it's great", and "very amusing because most of them are so silly". Some extremely low-budget, "awful" television ads were also discussed with great pleasure:

- I really love, it's so cheap, the Balmore Double Glazing. It's so bad...
- I like the one for Martin's Plant Hire
- Not, oh please no, oh no!
- Oh it's awful!
- It's quite a good advert. It's just so horrible, that's why I like it. [female students 18-20]

Clearly these ads are recognised as "bad". As discussed earlier, they may serve a simple diversion or novelty function, given the relative professionalism of most advertising. However, that would not fully explain the positive, almost perverse pleasure which these ads seemed to provide. Perhaps informants found them entertaining precisely because they were so "awful".

If the "badness" of these ads is indeed the source of their appeal, this is arguably only possible because informants are sophisticated consumers of advertising: they recognise that these ads dramatically break the conventions of "good" advertising and they relish that. This in turn allows them to congratulate themselves for their discernment (they recognise good and bad ads) and their independent spirit (they can choose to celebrate rather than denigrate bad ads). In what amounts to knowing subversiveness, informants seem to be like film buffs in their enjoyment of B movies: perhaps Balmore and Martin's Plant Hire are the advertising industry's equivalent of Godzilla, and enjoyed by the consumer connoisseurs in that spirit. The knowingness and irony which such an attitude suggests may again be related to Featherstone's [50] postmodern condition. In terms of uses and gratifications, however, enjoying the "B movie" ads may provide informants with a sense of their own taste, sophistication and even their subversion of "the system" of advertising. Discussing it with others presumably is a means of projecting and reinforcing these positive images of themselves.

Family Relationships

Several researchers have referred to interpersonal uses and gratifications of the mass media [5,13-15,30,31]. Advertising certainly featured in a variety of ways in informants' interactions with their families. It was occasionally a source of tension, as some female informants talked about their embarrassment at watching television with male family members (particularly teasing brothers) when personal hygiene ads came on. While these ads seemed to cut across the family along gender lines, others appeared to establish boundaries across generations. Thus, the British Telecom ads reminded one informant of the way some older members of her family behaved. Generational boundaries could also be established by differential responses to ads. For example, if older family members did not "get" a particular ad, they were effectively excluded:

> Me and my brother were watching it and my mum came through and we were killing ourselves laughing and she went "ha ha". She wasn't laughing, she wasn't as enthusiastic as we were.
>
> [female student 18-20]

On the other hand, ads could be used to remove generational boundaries by establishing some common ground. For example, one of the male students said he was always looking out for something in British Telecom ads which he could use to tease his mother, who worked for that company.

Peer Relationships

The interpersonal use of advertising extended well beyond informants' family circles. Thus, there were some indications of advertising being used for the purposes of male solidarity or "bonding". For example, there were many male references to and re-enactments of the Hamlet "world cup" ad, with particular reference to the point where a sensitive part of a footballer's anatomy was struck. One informant explained that the ad had been the subject of much discussion in the pub, and that "the guys were wincing at that one!". The Hamlet ad was also a source of great amusement with female informants. They found the injured man's misfortunes quite entertaining, but found the ad had other pay-offs for them as well:

> It was really good how they had that at the time of the World Cup. Cos you were sitting in the middle of this...and it just totally broke the ice. Cos you were sitting bored watching the football and you thought "Oh, that is really funny". And that did appeal to everybody.
>
> [female student 18-20]

As Lull [13,14] and Anderson and Meyer [15] have pointed out, the mass media facilitates communication in that it provides common ground, and an immediate agenda for talk. Indeed, a significant use of advertising appeared to be as a topic of conversation, at three levels. The first, most basic level was purely instrumental. Advertising, particularly on television, was an easy topic of conversation, almost a default option. Everyone was familiar with the same ads, and so they were easily drawn upon if things went quiet or there was nothing else to talk about. However, there were indications that it was also considered to be an interesting topic, worthy of talk in its own right:

> - It's a handy number when you're sort of stuck for conversation and you've just met someone.
> - No, I tend to talk about adverts mostly with my friends.
> - It's actually part of the conversation, not just filling in gaps. [unemployed females, 21-24]

Other informants pointed out that even though they might be watching television with friends, it was the ads which tended to generate comment and discussion. At the third level is advertising as discourse: talking about advertising is a distinct social skill, and there are conventions and expectations regarding an individual's competence in its practice. This may explain why the student felt stupid if he could not understand an ad, and his subsequent statement that "you've got to work it out in case it comes up in conversation". It also explains the seriousness with which some informants approached the question of "meaning" in ads:

You probably go into work the next day and say "Did you see that advert for lager? What the hell is that supposed to mean? Is it supposed to advertise lager?" [male worker, 21-24]

Willis [32] suggested that advertising is a form of cultural capital for young people. The different ways in which informants seem to use it in their conversations would support this. At the first, instrumental level, we can think of advertising as small change which feeds the meter of interaction. By the time we reach the third level, however, we can think of advertising as large banknotes to be invested carefully for their dividends in terms of social status and self-esteem.

CONCLUSIONS

This study focused on one age-group and one geographic region. Despite the restricted sample, it provides some empirical support for the academics and practitioners who have long argued that audiences are active, selective and sophisticated in their consumption of advertising. Furthermore, it seems that in their playfulness, subversiveness and self-consciousness knowingness, young people at any rate are comfortable and confident players with what Davidson [52] calls "advertising in postmodern times".

In light of the many ways in which advertisements provided satisfaction to informants in this study, advertising seems at least as fruitful an area for the application of uses and gratifications theory as any other element of the mass media. The various uses may be aligned in several ways. Thus, they have already been described as marketing or non-marketing uses. Non-marketing uses may in turn be grouped into five categories.

Structuring time appears to be quite a distinctive use of advertising. However, diversion, entertainment, play and escapism may all be described as some form of enjoyment, while surveillance, familiarity, education, and checking out the opposite sex all seem to involve scanning the environment in some way. Family and peer relationship uses may be described in terms of social interaction. The remaining uses seem related to a sense of self. While ego-enhancement and reinforcement of attitudes and values seem to involve self-affirmation, aspirations and role models suggest a sense of self-transformation.

Uses may also be described as personal, interpersonal, or, in the terms of Katz et al [5], oriented towards the social environment. This is not to say, however, that each use falls neatly into just one of these categories. For example, someone may use ads for play at a personal level by creating a collage, at an interpersonal level by guessing the brand or product with friends, and at the level of social orientation by mocking the behaviour or concerns of particular characters.

It is interesting that these categorisations have much in common with classifications derived from studies of other mass media uses and gratifications. If advertising

serves similar functions to the rest of the media, this in turn suggests that advertising is well-integrated into the mass media and indeed the lives of its audience.

TABLE 1. A CATEGORISATION OF ADVERTISING USES AND GRATIFICATIONS

Summary Category	Comprised of:
1. Marketing uses	Information Choice, competition and convenience Quality assurance/reassurance Consumption stimulation Vicarious consumption Added value
2. Structuring time	Structuring time
3. Enjoyment	Entertainment Diversion Escapism Play
4. Scanning the environment	Surveillance Familiarity Checking out the opposite sex Education
5. Social interaction	Family relationships Peer relationships
6. Self-affirmation/ transformation	Reinforcement of attitudes and values Ego enhancement Aspirations and role models

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One criticism of the uses and gratifications approach raised earlier was its tendency to provide lists of reasons for attending to the media, unaccompanied by systematic explanation. In the case of advertising, even such lists of uses are significant, as they undermine the conventional wisdom of advertising models which priviledge the sender's intentions over the receiver's interpretations [53], and assume a passive rather than active audience [27]. Acceptance of the active, reward-seeking consumer requires a fundamental re-orientation of the entire advertising planning process. Thus, research techniques need to become more sensitive and creative. Advertisements themselves can afford to be more demanding of their audience, and need to find ways of providing ostensibly non-marketing gratifications for consumers without losing sight of advertising objectives. Finally, methods of evaluation need to be based on more complex and less mechanistic models of

advertising effects.

Furthermore, there is much scope for integrating studies of advertising uses and gratifications within broader theoretical frameworks. In terms of the analysis of this data, the next phase will seek to link the uses identified here with interpretations of specific messages, and look for differences in patterns of use and interpretation between informants according to age, gender and occupational status. Such differences, while interesting in themselves, may well have implications for market segmentation and advertising copy strategy.

While Alwitt and Prabhaker [30] suggest that consumers' attitudes to television advertising are influenced by the functions which it serves for them, advertising uses and gratifications may also be helpful in understanding other aspects of advertising experience. For example, our understanding of the state, antecedents and consequences of advertising involvement is currently inadequate [54]. It does seem, however, that the uses to which consumers put advertising may explain, at least in part, why consumers allow themselves to become involved with particular advertisements.

While this study was not restricted to television advertising, in practice these informants' experience of advertising seemed so dominated by the television medium that there was little scope for comparing advertising uses and gratifications across media. Perhaps this is an issue which future research could usefully address. It would also be interesting to compare the pattern of uses and gratifications identified here with those of other age-groups and other cultures.

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